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August 2010

FOUR WEEKS ON and the World Cup already seems an age ago. We've touched on various aspects of the 2010 finals in this issue and we will continue to review events in South Africa over the coming months – not least as the ongoing issue of goal-line technology is debated and discussed.

But the European club season is already upon us, with some leagues having kicked off in mid-July. So that is our main focus this month, with detailed team-by-team previews of the major European leagues (page 40). We also delve deeper by previewing 24 other European leagues (starting on page 88).

The global financial crisis has had a major impact on this summer's transfer market, but clubs across the Continent have continued to wheel and deal, some with greater success than others.

Outside of Europe, too, football has quickly moved on after the World Cup. This month, we analyse Thierry Henry's move to Major League Soccer, a transfer that ultimately could prove more significant than that of David Beckham.

The Libertadores Cup reaches its climax this month. We'll bring you all the details of that in the next issue, alongside our annual guide to the group stages of the Champions League and Europa League.

See you then.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
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CONTRIBUTORS

David Miller attended his 14th World Cup in South Africa, having first reported on the Sweden finals in 1958

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SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER ON PAGE 38

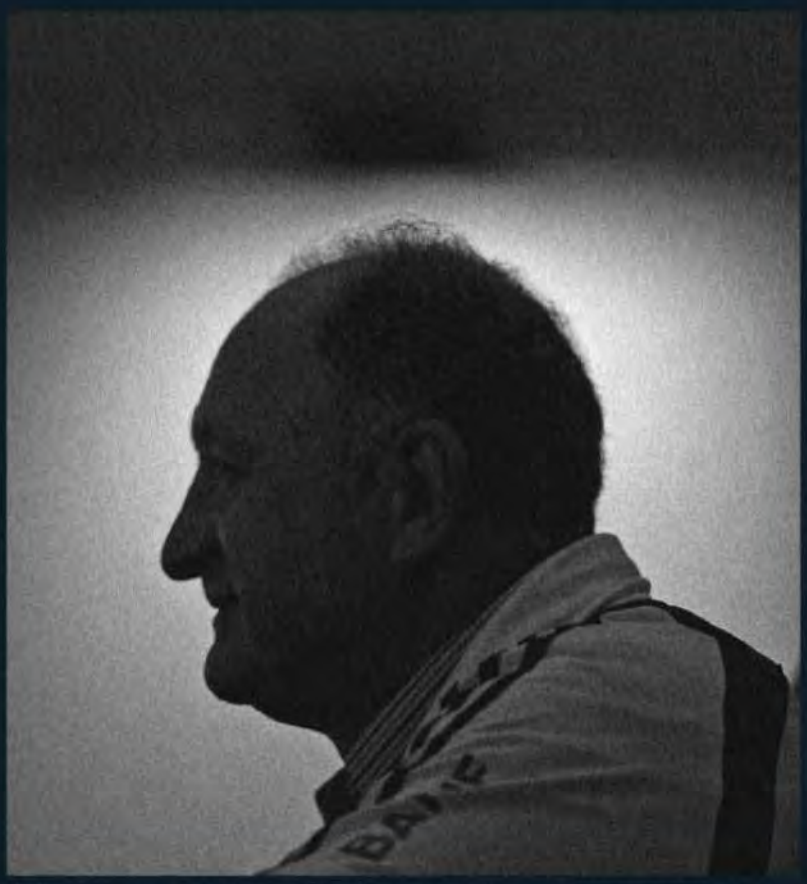
...IN PICTURES

The global game caught on camera

Not seeing eye to eye...Paul Ifill of Wellington Phoenix (left) and Boca Juniors' Christian Cellay, who was sent off, square up in a "friendly" in New Zealand

Rapid pain...Mario Sonnleitner of Rapid Wien receives treatment for a head injury against Wacker Innsbruck

Russian cheer...CSKA Moscow fans show support for their side against Krylia Sovetov



Shadow figure...will new Palmeiras coach Luis Felipe Scolari take charge of Brazil for the 2014 World Cup?

Keeping cool...Parma players relax in a river at Levico Terme, near Trento after a training session

Burning ambition...Al Ahli players celebrate winning the Egyptian Super Cup in Cairo

Diamonds are forever...Celtic play Sporting Lisbon in a pre-season friendly at the Boston Red Sox' Fenway Park baseball stadium in Massachusetts

Brian Glanville

...on the unfailing success of Rafa Benitez...more questions about Rooney and Capello...Hodgson's big challenge at Liverpool...and the fallout from France's World Cup

Nice work if you can get it...Benitez has landed on his feet at Inter

IN FOOTBALL, as in life at large, surely nothing succeeds like failure. Most recently, we have the puzzling case of Rafa Benitez, who has just left Liverpool with an inexplicable £4million pay-off and marched straight into the equivalent job at Internazionale. I am, Lord knows, no financial wizard, but it baffles me that a man who has gone from one plum managerial job to another is entitled to compensation.

More baffling still is the fact that Inter were so keen to appoint him. Like Alan Hansen, who has forcefully expressed his views, I cannot see what Benitez established at Anfield. Yes, Liverpool won the Champions League under his aegis, but that was surely despite him, rather than because of him. At half-time in that tumultuous Final in Istanbul, his team were 3-0 down because his inept tactics had allowed Kaka to run riot from midfield. At the break, Rafa came belatedly to his senses, set Dietmar Hamann to mark Kaka, the pendulum swung, Liverpool scored three goals and ultimately won on penalties.

Not for the first time, I was reminded of a clever American comic strip, *I Go Pogo*, depicting a troop of animals in the Florida Everglades. In one such episode, it pours heavily with rain. Miserable, the other animals elect the alligator as their new leader, whereupon it almost at once stops raining, for which the alligator claims the credit. The other animals demur, whereas the alligator makes the classic rejoinder: "Happened during my administration, didn't it?"

When Liverpool reached the Champions League Final a second time, Benitez inexplicably kept the swift and dynamic Craig Bellamy on the bench, even though Milan's central defence – one of whom was the veteran Paolo Maldini – would hardly have had the legs to resist him.

> "Liverpool won the Champions League despite Benitez rather than because of him"

Benitez's transfer policy at Anfield was also bizarre. To allow Xabi Alonso, the motor of midfield and a famous scorer of long-distance goals, to move to Real Madrid seemed a pure piece of self-destruction. Apparently, they were at odds, but surely the club's interests should have come first? To replace Alonso, Benitez gambled on Alberto Aquilani of Roma, beyond doubt a talented midfielder, but famously prey to injury. Indeed, he hardly played at all until late last season.

Then there was the baffling purchase of Robbie Keane from Tottenham Hotspur, expensively and needlessly. Liverpool were surely well covered up front and it was hard to see where Keane, for all his pace and skill, would fit in. In the event, he didn't, and he was packed off back to Spurs.

Last season was a comprehensive disaster for Liverpool. Having been ejected embarrassingly from the Champions League, they couldn't even cut it in the secondary Europa League, where they will have to eat humble pie again this season and face minnows in the early qualifying stages.

Now Benitez must follow in the forbidding footsteps of Jose Mourinho, winner not only of the scudetto but of the Champions League itself.

I suppose you could call him a bold man. But as Napoleon used to ask when one of his generals was up for promotion: "Is he lucky?"

He had better be.

IF Fabio Capello had stood aside – the FA knowing all too well that to sack him would cost them a cool £12m – who could have stepped into his place? Roy Hodgson seemed an ideal candidate; indeed, I had been keen for him to take the role as far back as 1994 after he had resourcefully taken his Switzerland team all the way to the American finals of the World Cup.

But Hodgson has left Fulham, who will sorely miss him, for Liverpool where his £3m-a-year

Poor decisions...Capello

salary will be hard earned. The club, as we know, are £330m in debt and have floundered under the misbegotten regime of the "Long and Short of it" – Gillett and Hicks – who evidently pull in two different directions and have reportedly been called to account by the Scottish bank to which Liverpool are beholden.

Yossi Benayoun, sold to Chelsea, is bound to be missed – as will Javier Mascherano, whose wife doesn't like it in Liverpool – yet it was strange to see the Israeli winger say how glad he was to get away from Benitez...when Benitez had already gone.

LUCKY certainly is Wayne Rooney, who, Alex Ferguson, his manager at Manchester United, assures us, will "bounce back" from his wretched display for England in South Africa. But it's arguable that he will never bounce back in terms of prestige and reputation. It was the second World Cup in which he foundered, though, to be fair, in Germany, where he was sent off against Portugal for an ugly offence, Rooney was plainly not fit.

But once again nothing succeeds like failure. At Old Trafford his weekly wage went up to £130,000, while I was glad to see that he won his £4m case against those agents who claimed breach of contract.

And Capello? Hugely paid, or overpaid, he survives as we know because the FA waived the clause which would have enabled them to terminate his contract, had it been done within a fortnight of the end of the World Cup. I suppose you can just about understand their evident fears that he might go to Inter, but it had surely been clear for some time that his England team had not resolved its problems.

It has also been puzzling that he came straight home after England's elimination, rather than watch the remainder of the World Cup tournament, heading, it seemed, straight for a beach. Nor did he trouble to go to France in July to watch the England Under-19 team, which surely did well to reach the semi-final stage, coming through their group against a France side which had thrashed Holland 4-1 in its opening game.

With the equivalent of a plea of "Not me, guv!" Capello duly denied any direct involvement with the marks which so embarrassingly filtered out from his ill-conceived Capello Index, assessing England's World Cup team.

Fair enough, we must believe him, as we must when he says he has not been making any money out of the initiative. Yet he initially gave his name to it and in his unwisdom unveiled it at the Stock Exchange before the tournament began.

THOUGH at first Laurent Blanc seemed to be taking a benign and tolerant view of the rebellious France World Cup squad, he then proceeded to drop all of them from the friendly against Norway in Oslo.

This is no more than the likes of the foul-mouthed and dissident Nicolas Anelka, Franck Ribery – seemingly in deep trouble over the alleged exploitation of under-aged prostitutes – Patrice Evra et al deserved, though it seems a little hard on such as the keeper, Hugo Lloris, and Yoann Gourcuff, for some reason a target for the hostility of Ribery and others, while Thierry Henry, now safely ensconced in New York after just 35 minutes on the field in South Africa, reportedly wouldn't let Gourcuff take his "specialist" free-kicks when he himself was captain.

Henry has been much criticised in France for failing to use his influence over the dissident players.

Still, perhaps he reasoned that, with his double handball against Ireland, he had done enough to get France to South Africa. ●

Dropped...the France World Cup squad

GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Clinical...Shirokov

1 Roman Shirokov, Zenit v Sibir
Times his run perfectly to meet Danny's flick and sidefoot home

2 Willian, Figueirense v Santo Andre
Meets a chipped pass and volleys home from edge of the penalty area

3 Marcos Assuncao, Palmeiras v Botafogo
Curls a free-kick from 25 yards into top right-hand corner of the goal

4 Ezequiel Calvente, Spain U19s v Italy U19s
Wrong foots the keeper from the penalty spot

5 Linus Hallenius, Hammarby v Syrianska
Knocks the ball over his opponent before volleying home, a la Marco Van Basten

6 Sergio Canales, Spain U19s v England U19s
Clever free-kick, flicked over the wall for Canales to score

Cool...Canales

AND ONE TO FORGET...

Laughing stock...Siem de Jong (centre) capitalises on the mistake

In a pre-season friendly against Ajax, Chelsea goalkeeper **Ross Turnbull** *fails to gather a long clearance from his opposite number, with disastrous results*

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

NUMBERS GAME

£64.36m
Barcelona's loss last year, according to an audit commissioned by new president Sandro Rosell

£369.5m
total Barcelona debt

£125m
loan taken out by Barcelona to fund wages this summer

£33.4m
transfer fee paid by Barcelona to Valencia for striker David Villa

£29m
bid from Barcelona for Cesc Fabregas that was rejected by Arsenal

£12.5m
fee received by Barcelona from Shakhtar Donetsk for defender Dmytro Chygrynskiy

Wanted...Fabregas sports a Barca shirt

REPORTS we couldn't make up

GOALKEEPER ON MURDER CHARGE

Flamengo have suspended keeper Bruno Fernandes after he was arrested and accused of masterminding the abduction and execution of a former lover.

Police claim he plotted the killing of 25-year-old Eliza Samudio, who disappeared in June, leaving behind a four-month-old baby she claimed had been fathered by Fernandes.

The goalkeeper's 17-year-old cousin has allegedly confessed to taking part in the crime.

Arrested...Fernandes arrives at a Belo Horizonte jail wearing a red prison uniform

ORANGE PRIEST SUSPENDED

A Catholic priest who held an orange-themed mass in support of Holland's national team has fallen foul of his local bishop.

The Reverend Paul Vlaar wore an orange robe and decked out his church in orange before the World Cup Final, but Jozef Punt, Bishop of Haarlem, said he had not paid sufficient respect to the sacred nature of the Eucharist.

He ordered Mr Vlaar to enter "a period of reflection" and suspended him from his duties.

Total football...Reverend Vlaar

REFEREE ATTACKED IN CHINA

Chinese club Qingdao have denied that a fan who ran onto the pitch and launched a kick at the ref during a Super League game was a club employee.

The pitch invader, who was wearing club-branded shorts and trainers, was angry that referee Wang Zhe had sent off two Qingdao players in quick succession during a 2-0 defeat by Shanghai Shenhua.

"The man was definitely not on the staff of our club. He was just an emotional fan," said Yu Tao, Qingdao's general manager. "The referee failed to control the game. Perhaps he was too young."

RUMOURS we'd like to believe

Unhappy...Taiwo

Unhappy at not being a regular for Marseille, Nigerian left-back Taye Taiwo will run down his contract and head for the Premier League on a Bosman free next summer.

Southern German insiders are adamant that Hoffenheim midfielder Tobias Weis is a long-term target for Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich. Weis is on the fitness trail after a knee operation, but Bayern are prepared to wait their moment.

Argentinian sources believe that a leading, unnamed Spanish club are close to clinching a deal to recruit talented young River Plate striker Daniel Villalba. The plan would be to loan him back to River for a season.

It may not be about to happen just yet but, according to *Gazzetta dello Sport*, Juventus' Brazilian playmaker Diego is less than happy with life in Serie A and he is seriously contemplating a return to the Bundesliga, where he used to star for Werder Bremen. Hamburg are at the front of the queue.

Germany calling...Diego (left)

Paul Gardner

A World Cup ruined by fear of losing

ON THE whole, I thought the calibre of the football played at the World Cup in South Africa was lousy. It has finally sunk in to the coaches (slow learners, that lot) that losing your opening game is not a good idea.

In fact, going into this tournament the statistics could hardly have been bleaker. Since the start of the 32-team World Cups in 1998, 36 teams had lost their first game. And 33 of those teams had failed to make it out of the first round. Which mean odds of about 12/1 against qualifying.

So, once the news was spread, we got a quite dreadfully cautious series of opening games: 16 of them, two for each group. Only Germany, with their 4-0 romp against the Socceroos, livened things up. Sixteen games, only 25 goals, or 1.6 per game. Omitting the Germany game, it was 1.4 per game.

What a way to start the greatest show on earth! One was reduced to praising the referees, who, by the end of the first round, had performed almost faultlessly. It was a state of affairs, however, that did not seem likely to last.

Sunday June 27 was the officials' *dies horribilis* – the day that Jorge Larrionda and his assistant failed to spot Frank Lampard's shot bounce about a yard over the Germany goal line, and the day the Italian referee Roberto Rosetti and, in particular, his assistant Stefano Ayroldi managed to allow Argentina's Carlos Tevez to score a blatantly offside goal against Mexico.

The Mexicans will not find anything funny in that incident, but I did – it was the reaction from the stiffnecks at FIFA that had me rolling about.

Awful call by the referees? Too bad. Tough luck, it happens. Goodbye Mexico. But, what's this? The people in charge of what is shown on the big screen in Soccer City put up a replay of the incident so that everyone in the stadium could see the travesty.

Now, that really is something to get hot and bothered about.

Why, it's almost like using goal-line technology, so we can't have that.

Offside...Tevez (no11) scores for Argentina against Mexico

"FIFA, with a horrendous mistake in its lap, had the means to correct it but chose to ignore it"

"A clear mistake," said FIFA spokesman Nicolas Maingot. He was referring to the use of the replay, not the refereeing error. He continued: "This will be corrected...we will work on this and be a bit more, I would say, tight on this for the games to be played."

Talk about shooting the messenger. Here we have FIFA with a horrendous mistake landed in its lap, and the means to correct it immediately are right there – but FIFA ignores that and to clamp down on the South African staff who delivered the message.

Here was a clear case where the "goal" could quite easily have been cancelled out; there was, after all, no continuous play to worry about. Are we really expected to believe that Rosetti would rather go along with a colleague's error – one that may well have cost him his chance of refereeing the Final – than use technology to correct it?

So I'm giving my 2010 World Cup Ostrich – awarded for outstanding head-in-the-sand activities – to FIFA for its "they shall not see" ruling.

I also feel that I should be making another award, to goalkeepers, for Dedicated Stupidity. They were the loudest to complain (as always) about the Jabulani ball: how it was a nightmare, how they couldn't work it out, and so on – all of which carried the clear implication that more goals would be scored. We've heard this pathetic blathering before, of course.

Bad call...ref Rosetti (left) and his Italian assistant got it wrong

A new ball is always unpredictable, but we never get more goals. This time, as is usually the case, we got fewer goals. The goals-per-game average in South Africa was 2.27, making it the second-lowest-scoring World Cup ever.

Then there's this. In the England-Germany game, David James twice made goal-preventing saves, from Mesut Ozil and then Miroslav Klose. Later, Germany keeper Manuel Neuer made a last-second intervention to get to the ball before Jermain Defoe.

We had similar crucial saves in the tournament by Switzerland's Diego Benaglio to thwart Spain's Gerard Pique, Nigeria's Vincent Enyeama to stop Tevez and Lionel Messi of Argentina and Australia's Luke Wilkshire, and Spain's Iker Casillas' desperation 89th-minute save from Paraguay's Roque Santa Cruz.

Why am I picking on these particular saves? If you're still wondering, I'll add two more from the Final: Casillas' save from Holland's Arjen Robben in the 62nd minute and Maarten Stekelenburg's 95th minute save from Cesc Fabregas.

All 10 of the saves mentioned were made without the goalkeeper using his hands. Instead, the ball was blocked by his body or deflected by his legs. I counted 23 such saves, including one where the ball smacked into the face of the Slovakia keeper Jan Mucha. Although that's an underestimate (I didn't keep records in eight games) it already seems a lot to me – but I've no way of knowing whether it's an unusually high total.

As I believe that goalkeepers are already a much-favoured species, it roils me that, having been given the huge advantage of using their hands, they are now also making crucial saves with their feet. How about a ban on goalkeepers using their feet?

Just kidding, of course. ●

David
Miller

Six lessons from South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA may have been enriched by the World Cup, with even the lowliest citizens sensing the moral reward of hosting the rest of the world and being the first nation in Africa to do so, but football was, largely, the poorer for the 2010 finals.

Africa's six finalists failed in the collective ambition to climb higher on the ladder of prestige, while the beautiful game, not least Brazil's, predominantly found itself either shut out by forbiddingly spiked defences – in a bizarre parallel with the massive, omnipresent electronic civil security which betrays any semblance of genuine racial or economic equality within the Rainbow Nation – or by self-denial: as in the case of capitulating Italy and France, wretchedly incompetent England and ultimately Brazil, who were temperamentally flawed against Holland.

Expediency and functionalism became slave-masters under the rule of safety-first coaches at the expense of entertainment. Ultimately we have to be grateful that Spain, genuine masters of the game, kept their nerve in the face of Holland's wanton intimidation in the Final. If Xavi and his colleagues were at times driven to retaliation, in kind, they never abandoned their principle of repetitively seeking the perfect pass, the perfect move, the perfect goal. It was this dedication that threatened to deny them the triumph they so deserved, becoming the first double European and world champions since West Germany in 1972-74. In my view, Spain's was the greater achievement.

That respected veteran commentator of the *Sunday Times*, Hugh McIlvanney, with experience stretching over 11 World Cups, regrets that Spain's triumph was compromised by having scored the fewest goals, eight, of any champions. Yet what is to be expected when more than half the 32 teams are strategically organised specifically to stop the opposition from playing? Acclaim for Spain must rest equally on Vicente Del Bosque, that wily old coach who refused to be deviated when defeated in the opening group match by Switzerland's 10-man rearguard. Two goals against both Honduras and Chile saw Spain back in their acknowledged European stride.

The lessons of 2010 are many, but six seem to me pre-eminent if football is not to be strangled by its ruthless tactical advance.

1 Stronger, practical, support for referees

Has FIFA the flexibility or the will to provide it? It is not just the matter of available goal-mouth technology, as with Frank Lampard's "unseen" goal against Germany. (Incidentally, technical adjudication in sport was first introduced in South African cricket – ahead of tennis and rugby – by executive director Dr Ali Bacher, in conjunction with match referee Clive Lloyd, for the inaugural Test series against India in 1992.)

For repetitive fouling, teams such as Holland in the Final should be retrospectively fined – as were Argentina following the 1996 quarter-final against England and Leeds United by the FA for persistent abuse in league matches in the 1970s – and given a three-point penalty for the next qualifying competition.

Howard Webb, the Final referee, was placed in an intolerable situation by Holland's callous tactics. Had he sent off three players in the first half, quite legitimately, he would have been condemned by some for "ruining the final". Incessant yellow cards served to subdue the Dutch assault: a betrayal of the legacy of Total Football under Rinus Michels and Johan Cruyff.

2 Stricter application of the laws

In many of the 20 matches which I attended in South Africa, there could have been at least half-a-dozen bookings or red cards/penalties at corners and free-kicks for blatant wrestling. Many defenders no longer watch the incoming ball but exclusively an opponent, with the objective of holding or blocking. They make Jack Charlton or Norman Hunter – "tread on their toes" – look positively amateur.

Spain provided an echo of past glories: of Hungary of the 1950s, of Brazil, Holland and Yugoslavia of the 1970s; an echo of Tottenham's push-and-run under Arthur Rowe; of Ajax, of the Milan of Van Basten and Gullit. The basic virtues of the game never change.

There will be no beautiful game of the future if referees are not supported in halting the wrestling. Strict action would solve the problem overnight.

3 Award penalty-goals

FIFA should emulate rugby, allowing the referee the option of awarding a goal where a defending player on the goal line handles the ball or fouls an opponent to prevent an otherwise certain goal. This would have been the proper decision against Luis Suarez of

The beautiful game...Xavi torments the Holland defence

> "Xavi and his Spain colleagues never abandoned their principle of repetitively seeking the perfect pass, the perfect move, the perfect goal"

Not to blame...referee Webb in the Final

Uruguay; Ghana's Asamoah Gyan then missing the extra-time injury-time potential match-winning penalty.

In 1962, Johnny Byrne, the West Ham United and England striker, punched a certain goal over the bar when defending against West Bromwich Albion in a league match. West Brom missed the penalty. Major Wilson Keys, West Bromwich chairman and head of England's then-selection committee, ensured Byrne was omitted from the World Cup squad for Chile.

4 Penalty shoot-outs

This deplorable system of determining a result should be replaced, after extra time, by teams being reduced every five or 10 minutes successively to 10, nine, eight men, until one side scores. This would be a dramatic continuation of proper play.

Shoot-outs usually produce not a hero but more often a villain: some luckless soul who misses and will live with the shadow for the rest of his career, if not his life.

5 Africa's shortfall

This problem lies primarily with African national federations and their lack of coaching and financial stability. Nigeria and Ivory Coast switched coaches in a panic after what they regarded as "unsatisfactory" performances in the Nations Cup, respectively third-placed and quarter-finalists.

Ghana would have been the first African World Cup semi-finalists had they not been cheated by Uruguay and demonstrated the benefit of continuity from national junior sides and stable team management. *Bafana Bafana*, in truth, never had serious hope, whatever Carlos Alberto Parreira might have done, with a squad in which 16 of the 23 were home-based, lacking wider experience of major leagues.

The whole African game cannot fully develop until national economies can support stronger home leagues performing at higher levels.

6 Creating more space and freedom

More than 20 years ago, as defences became ever tighter, Bob Paisley of Liverpool suggested that the only way to loosen the reins was to reduce teams to 10 men. This would have the effect of "widening" the field of play, increasing the rate of fatigue, which in turn accelerates the breakdown of defensive organisation.

FIFA would no doubt reject the thought because it would not be applied uniformly at every level of football, though it would certainly be worth an experiment. ●

HEROES...

Loyal servant...Etxeberria

● JOSEBA ETXEBERRIA

After a final season playing for free for Athletic Bilbao, the forward finally retired.

● GUTI

With all the attention on Raul, the midfielder's departure from Real Madrid, after 15 years and 542 appearances, was overlooked by many.

Overlooked...Guti

& VILLAINS

Denied...Jones

● BLACKBURN ROVERS

The Premier League club refused to release defender Phil Jones for England's squad at the European Under-19 championship.

● JOSE PEDROSO

The Paraguayan quit Chilean second division club Rangers after grabbing a referee around the throat and trying to choke him.

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11 STORIES YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

ENGLAND

Man City versus the rest

Manchester City were the summer's big spenders in the transfer market, with spending set to exceed £100million. More, page 40

USA

American revolution?

Thierry Henry was greeted with a low-key reception when he signed for New York. More, page 24

BRAZIL

Menezes named

Corinthians boss Mano Menezes was announced as the *selecao*'s new coach after Muricy Ramalho turned the job down. More, page 28

ARGENTINA

Maradona sacked

Diego Maradona denounced the federation after it decided not to renew his contract as national coach. More, page 86

SPAIN

New man at Camp Nou

Sandro Rosell has already made his mark after winning this summer's presidential election in Barcelona. More, page 17

GERMANY
Raul joins Schalke
Spain's all-time top scorer made a surprise move to the Bundesliga after being released by Real Madrid. More, page 16

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Big spenders
Some of the biggest deals of the summer transfer window involved players moving from western European clubs to Russia. More, page 86

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Qualifiers start
The qualifying rounds of the European club competitions kicked off in early July. More, page 84

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Blanc's bombshell
New national coach Laurent Blanc dropped all 23 World Cup players from his first squad. More, page 32

Raul
Record-breaking striker heads for Schalke

GERMANY

RAUL GONZALEZ BLANCO, one of the greatest players ever to wear the white shirt of Real Madrid, has bid an emotional farewell to the club where he made his debut at the age of 17, and moved to Bundesliga side Schalke.

"The time has come," said the 33-year-old. "I want to know what football is like in another culture before returning home again.

"I feel sad today because I have spent so many years here. I've given everything while wearing this shirt. My children are also sad because they are Madrid supporters, but now I'm beginning a new stage in my career."

Raul's career has been showered with titles and records. As well as six Spanish championships and three Champions Leagues, he scored 323 times in 741 games for Real and is Spain's all-time leading scorer with 44 goals in 102 appearances.

In contrast, Schalke, who are based in Germany's industrial Ruhr region, won the last of their seven titles in 1958.

"It's great news for Schalke," says the German club's coach, Felix Magath. "I am pleased that we have succeeded in such an exceptional footballer and world-class striker switching to the Bundesliga for Schalke.

"He will be an inspiration. His qualities will help us."

Yet Raul's career has been in decline since he failed to make Spain's squad for Euro 2008. Overlooked by Manuel Pellegrini at Madrid last season, he has now been shown the door, along with another long-serving player, Guti, by Jose Mourinho as the new coach seeks to impose his will on the club.

Last season Raul had hinted at ending his career in the USA and he was recently linked with Tottenham Hotspur, but his wages are likely to have been a significant turn-off. "Financially, I don't think it would be possible to do a deal," said Spurs boss Harry Redknapp.

Schalke were able to tempt Raul into a two-year contract as they can offer Champions League football this season – and he needs just three more goals to overtake Gerd Muller's all-time European club competition record haul of 69.

John Holmesdale

Fresh start...Raul with new boss Magath

Playing the game...Barcelona's new president

Sandro Rosell
Barcelona president ushers in new era

SPAIN

ON THE FACE OF IT, it appears that the world has been turned upside down. Everything is back to front, the wrong way round. But it may not be as inexplicable as it seems. Time will tell.

Last summer, Florentino Perez returned as president of Real Madrid unopposed, despite having walked away a failure at the end of his first spell in charge, as the club closed in on its longest drought in 50 years. This summer, Barcelona fans resoundingly voted against their president, Joan Laporta, despite him having overseen a unique six-trophy haul in a solitary year, and the club racking up two European Cups and four league titles in six years with a team packed with home-grown talents.

Of course, Laporta was not actually voted out of office. His term as president had, according to the club's statutes, come to a natural end.

The new man in charge at the Camp Nou is Sandro Rosell – Laporta's former vice-president but who had very loudly, very publicly, split from his former best friend. The one-time Nike executive had been planning his presidential return virtually from the day he departed.

It was a strange campaign. Barcelona fans have never had it so good and things are so unquestionably successful at the moment that there weren't even the usual grand promises of big-name signings this summer. In fact, there was very little in the way of sporting policies at all. All the presidential candidates had expressed a desire for Pep Guardiola, currently little short of a deity at Barca, to continue as coach. Mostly, when asked about changes to the team they simply mumbled a little awkwardly: "Erm, I'd have to ask Pep."

Laporta was the man who had signed Guardiola, at a time when virtually everyone wanted Mourinho – now, ironically, at Madrid and the most hated man in Catalonia. But still the fans had turned against Laporta.

Ultimately, he had paid for mass walkouts from his board and a feeling that he had turned, in the words of one director, "dictatorial". There were revelations about him spying on fellow directors and presidential candidates and question marks about shady deals in Uzbekistan. Above all, there was his growing ego and naked political ambition and Laporta will now go into politics as a Catalan nationalist.

He also paid for Rosell's clever courting of the media and his shrewd political manoeuvring to present himself as the victim of Laporta's authoritarianism. Rosell has friends in high places, among them Perez. He is charismatic, and has been a huge success financially, with links to the most significant figures in Catalan business and social society.

It fell to Rosell to blame Laporta for the impossibility of signing Cesc Fabregas, revealing the club's debt and admitting that his first act in charge was to seek bank loans to the tune of £125m. He then stripped Johan Cruyff of the honorary presidency that Laporta had conferred upon him – an act Rosell denounced as purely political – and replaced Txiki Begiristain with Andoni Zubizarreta as sporting director.

Throughout the presidential campaign, Rosell was able to present himself as a dynamic, modern and moderate man – no one picked up on his remarks when he complained that young African boys were "taking chances away from our Catalan kids" in the club's youth system, which also hinted at his popularity and control of the media.

Rosell presented himself extremely well and was at ease in front of the cameras. He also successfully portrayed himself as the man who, through his contacts with Nike, brought Ronaldinho to the club – though, notably, not as the man at all responsible for the Brazilian's subsequent decline.

Rosell handled the campaign and his image masterfully. The question now is whether he will handle the club as well.

Sid Lowe

High fliers...Xavi (centre) celebrates with his World Cup-winning team-mates on the plane taking them home from South Africa

Xavi
Midfield maestro who still wants more

SPAIN

VERY FEW players have been blessed with the sort of achievements that have showered down upon the Barcelona and Spain midfielder over the past two years. The best player when Spain signalled their belated arrival at the top of the international game in 2008, for many he deserved a repeat of that accolade at this year's World Cup. But Xavi's not complaining; it's not his style.

Instead, the 30-year-old puts all his effort – both mental and physical – at the service of the team, and to succeed in partnership with his colleagues is the ultimate prize for him. He also envisages much more success in the future, particularly after returning from South Africa to find a "contract for life" waiting for him from the new Barcelona president, Sandro Rosell.

"The truth is that I believe there are still many trophies and titles out there to be won and I'm confident I can do that with Barcelona," says Xavi. "Anyway, I'm very much a *cule* [Barcelona supporter] and that is what suits both the club and myself."

Winning the European Championship and World Cup double with Spain – matching the achievements of West Germany in 1972 and 1974, and France in 1998 and 2000 – was the icing on the cake for a player who achieved a unique clean sweep of all six available titles at club level in 2009: Spanish league, Spanish Cup, Spanish Super Cup, Champions League, European Super Cup and Club World Cup.

That was history of one sort; helping Spain win the World Cup after losing their opening game was something else, as no other world champions had ever recovered from such a bad start in the tournament's 80-year history.

"That defeat had a big effect on us," admits Xavi. "It put us under great pressure right from the start because if we had lost the second game we would have been out. The day we beat Portugal in the second round was the moment we started to relax and regain confidence that we could be the team we all wanted again.

"I'd say we had a remarkable World Cup, not outstanding maybe, but remarkable all the same."

He also believes Spain play their best football against better opposition – as seen in the second half against Portugal and then against Germany.

"It's always like that," he continues. "We enjoy ourselves more when we are up against teams who want to come out and test us, who want to play their football, rather than those who just want to shut down the game. That is why to win the World Cup, out of everything we have won, was the greatest achievement.

"Not that it stops there. I never get tired of winning things. I'm still as ambitious as I was back at the start of the World Cup. Anyone who doesn't want to win is a waste of sporting space."

That approach is clearly common to everyone at Barcelona – including, of course, Leo Messi who, for Xavi, was the outstanding individual at the World Cup, even though he failed to score.

"Messi had an extraordinary World Cup," he says. "He is the perfect mixture: a fantastic individual who works hard and does everything he can for his team, whether that's Barcelona or Argentina. In South Africa, he was the No1."

The two will take the field again this season with a shared ambition to maintain their domination in Spain and regain the top international prizes. To that end, it was crucial that Barca kept Pep Guardiola at the helm.

"Pep has built a fantastic football foundation and it was important he knew he could work the way he wanted," adds Xavi. "He knows everything about the game and has given us discipline and a tactical framework which is so good it does not need any adjustment.

"I'm not bothered that Jose Mourinho has come to Spanish football. Real Madrid have been signing top people for the last couple of years and we have consistently got the better of them. So they have one of the best coaches in the world now? Good, it'll just motivate us all the more."

Keir Radnedge

Diego Forlan

Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan striker is now one of Europe's most wanted

SPAIN

AFTER THE EVENTS of the summer of 2004 – when, unwanted at Manchester United and wondering whether he might best be advised to go home to South America – Diego Forlan's career has undergone a remarkable turnaround.

The Atletico Madrid striker's inspiration, hard work, fair play and exemplary leadership in South Africa were pre-eminent factors in Uruguay's best finish at the World Cup finals since 1970, when old heroes such as Pedro Rocha, Roberto Matosas, Luis Cubilla and Ladislao Mazurkiewicz also reached the semi-finals and were ultimately placed fourth. He also earned the ultimate recognition when he was awarded the Golden Ball as player of the tournament.

Twice winner of the European Golden Shoe – as leading scorer in the continent's domestic leagues – Forlan stepped up decisively into the international elite in May when he scored both goals as Atletico beat Fulham 2-1 in the extra-time climax of the Europa League Final.

Then, little more than three weeks later, he was joint-top scorer in South Africa. Germany's Thomas Muller may have collected the World Cup Golden Shoe on the basis of more assists, but Forlan would have beaten him to it – and David Villa and Wesley Sneijder – had his last-second free-kick not ricocheted away off the top of Germany keeper Hans-Jorg Butt's bar in their third-place play-off.

Forlan was released by United in August 2004 because, though fans appreciated his industry, 17 goals in 98 appearances was not the sort of return demanded by manager Alex Ferguson. His ratio of 29 goals in 69 games for his country, however, is far better.

Forlan has no reservations about the overall outcome in South Africa and says: "Spain put on the best performances and were well-deserved winners. They played far better than anyone else there.

"They didn't score many goals – we scored more [11 to Spain's eight] – but players like David Villa and Andres Iniesta can score the important goals which win matches. Iniesta, especially, finds spaces on the pitch which catch the opposition off guard."

After it was all over, Forlan – now a wanted man all over Europe – touched base in Spain just long enough to pass through the Atletico offices before flying off on holiday, dismissing all questions about his future.

"I am very proud that I helped Atletico win their first European trophy since before I was born," he says. "I know there's talk about the future but I am very happy here. There is always speculation of one sort or another. If my brother or my agent call me then I will think about things. Otherwise, absolutely not.

"When I came back from the World Cup only one thing was certain: that Atletico will be playing Inter in the European Supercup at the end of August."

Ironically, or coincidentally, as Forlan took his well-earned break, Inter were at the head of the queue of clubs being linked with a bid.

Atletico, officially, refused to even discuss the possibility of selling but – as with Fernando Torres in his time – they have a "reserve price". In Forlan's case this is £30million, twice any likely initial offer for a player who is no sparkling new boy at 31.

Forlan may appear to lack the aura which clings, for one reason or another, to previous World Cup Golden Ball winners such as Diego Maradona, Paolo Rossi, Toto Schillaci, Ronaldo, Romario and Zinedine Zidane. But, for all his modesty, he will not waste time worrying on that score; it's mixed up with other memories.

"On one hand it's unbelievable when I think that players like Muller, Robben, Sneijder, Iniesta or Xavi could have been the Golden Ball winner," he admits. "They're all great players so I have to say a special thank you to my team-mates who gave me all the support I needed to do whatever I did.

"Mind you, I would have swapped the award for us to get to the Final."

Keir Radnedge

Inspirational...Forlan was the driving force that took Uruguay to the World Cup semi-finals

Keir Radnedge

Back on the agenda

Goal-line technology will be discussed by the IFAB in October, but Platini's plan for additional assistants is gaining momentum

AN INTRIGUING duel between philosophy and pragmatism is building up over how best to help referees make more accurate – and correct – judgments of incidents in and around the penalty area.

The theme was moved forward by the business meeting near Cardiff in July of the law-making International Football Association Board (IFAB) in the wake of the World Cup storm over Frank Lampard's phantom "goal" for England against Germany.

Last spring the IFAB shelved any further experimentation with goal-line technology and approved a widening of trials using extra assistants – something that has the enthusiastic backing of UEFA president Michel Platini.

Initially FIFA president Sepp Blatter viewed favourably the "additional linesmen" concept as a means to hold at bay supporters of technology. Blatter had always espoused the theory of universality, which means that the game should be played the same way – no matter whether it's in the World Cup or a pub tournament.

"In life, perfection is not possible and football is a reflection of this," Blatter told me. "We must live with human error in life and in football."

However, he was forced to retreat under pressure from the worldwide storm which erupted when Lampard's goal was disallowed by referee Jorge Larrionda, and then again when Mexico conceded a clearly offside goal to Argentina.

FIFA thus submitted a proposal for the question of goal-line technology to be formally discussed at the IFAB's next meeting in October.

> **Blatter was forced to retreat under the worldwide storm which erupted over Lampard's phantom 'goal' and the clearly offside goal for Argentina against Mexico**

In the meantime, Platini's preferred option of additional assistants will be trialled over a wider swathe of competitions. Having been launched in the Europa League, it will be extended to include this season's Champions League and the European Supercup, which is to be held in Monaco at the end of August.

Other competitions approved for the experiment include the Asian Confederation President's Cup, the Brazilian Baino women's championship, the Rio de Janeiro state championship and the French League Cup.

Blatter and Platini divided

The issue appears to have thus now divided Blatter and Platini – with the latter still thinking as Blatter used to – and one wonders how the politics will play out next spring when the IFAB annual meeting is likely to be asked to sanction new goal-line technology experiments while still overseeing the additional-assistants trial.

Next spring, of course, will also see FIFA preparing for a presidential election. At the moment Blatter looks unassailable; on the other hand, it would be interesting to see a challenge from a candidate working from a technologically-assisted manifesto.

With Qatar proposing revolutionary air-cooling systems in its 2022 World Cup bid and Japan, in pursuit of the same goal, promoting a worldwide 3-D TV proposal, all it needs now is South Korea – also in the 2022 hunt – and its FIFA vice-president Chung Mong-joon to bring forward a proposal of their own... ●

Clear case for technology...Lampard's shot beats Manuel Neuer and bounces over the line but neither referee Larrionda or his assistant were able to give the goal

Will Mourinho spend again in Madrid?

IT will be fascinating to see how closely events at Real Madrid will follow the Jose Mourinho/Roman Abramovich pattern, this time with club president Florentino Perez in the supporting role to the "Special One".

The lessons of Mourinho's tenure at Chelsea offer hints. When he arrived at Stamford Bridge in 2005, formal responsibility for the signing of players lay with then-chief executive Peter Kenyon. Mourinho still had significant input, as was evidenced by players he brought in: Ricardo Carvalho and Paulo Ferreira, to name but two, were men with whom he had worked before – hence the reports that he wants to bring Maicon from Internazionale to Spain.

Who's No1?... Perez (left) and Mourinho may well lock horns

Abramovich, like all other football-investing oligarchs, had his own personal scouting and advisory staff, and these guided his pre-Mourinho purchases. Later, however, the owner's preferences clearly cut across the manager's perception of the team's needs, notably with Andriy Shevchenko.

Mourinho also believes in bringing his personal influence to bear in attempts to sign the players he wants, sending Ricardo Quaresma a stream of encouraging text messages when Inter wanted the winger. Earlier, when trying to lure Ashley Cole away from Arsenal, Mourinho attended the secret hotel meeting between the player and Chelsea officials.

He has said: "All you need is a strong group of players – you don't need a Hollywood star. The galactico image comes from those players' social lives and the fame they have achieved. That is what I distrust about such players, not their ability."

Mourinho's strategy has always been about building a team in the fullest sense of the word and, to that end, he persuaded Abramovich to spend just over £250million in four summers. We all know the outcome. Will it be any different under Perez?

China hint at 2026 bid

NOW that another World Cup has been ticked off, attention turns to not one, or even two, but three more.

Brazil in 2014 will demand that FIFA exert 2010-type oversight and enforcement – at least the Brazilians are proposing a reversion to the "cluster system" where each group is based in the same area to ease transport difficulties – but of more immediate concern is the awarding of the 2018 and 2022 finals, with FIFA's executive making up its mind on December 2 in Zurich.

Informally, 2018 is almost certainly heading for Europe, with England and Russia the main contenders, Holland/Belgium working hard and Spain/Portugal buoyed by the former's World Cup triumph.

Far murkier is the battle behind the scenes for 2022. The United States is bidding for both 2018 and 2022 but the latter is the sole focus for the four Asian contenders: Australia, Japan, Qatar and South Korea.

All the bidding candidates are currently hosting visits from FIFA's inspection team, led by Chilean federation president Harold Mayne-Nicholls. However, the Asian focus has been thrown off-balance by a public signal that China is considering a bid to host in 2026.

This may seem a long way off, but the significance lies in the move's manipulation of the selection system.

FIFA has ruled that no confederation may host consecutive finals, hence the implication that China hopes FIFA's executive will overlook Asia altogether. It would then be clear to apply for 2026 in the belief that a sense of political fair play would support a bid for what would be presented as the first Asian finals in 24 years.

Wei Di, leader of China's FA, says: "We are studying the feasibility and have yet to submit the request to the State General Administration of Sports for approval to proceed with a formal bid. But we think this could be the right time to bid. It would produce great changes to Chinese soccer."

The Chinese also believe they have nothing to prove at organisational level after their success in staging the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Success...Argentina triumphed in Beijing

Martial arts... Nigel De Jong catches Xabi Alonso

Holland supporters have short memories

I WAS not surprised to receive a shoal of complaints from Holland objecting to my castigation of the behaviour of "Bruiser Bert" Van Marwijk's players in the World Cup Final.

OK, my critics said, the Dutch players may have got stuck in, but they didn't resort to horrible, scandalous, disgraceful acts such as waving imaginary yellow cards at the referee in the manner of those sly Spaniards.

This may be true. On the other hand, I've never seen a leg broken or an Achilles tendon ripped by the waving of an imaginary card.

However, I do remember Marco Van Basten being forced into premature retirement by the vicious assaults week in, week out, on the back of his legs and ankles. He was Dutch. Surprising how short are the memories of some fans.

NUMBERS

26 countries whose most players at

113	ENGLAND
82	GERMANY
81	ITALY
55	SPAIN
47	FRANCE
33	HOLLAND
26	JAPAN
23	PORTUGAL
20	GREECE
20	MEXICO
20	NORTH KOREA
17	SOUTH AFRICA
14	RUSSIA
14	TURKEY
13	SOUTH KOREA
11	ARGENTINA
10	SWITZERLAND
10	CHILE
9	DENMARK
9	NEW ZEALAND
7	USA
7	SCOTLAND
6	BELGIUM
6	ISRAEL
5	BRAZIL
4	ROMANIA

82 GERMANY

81 ITALY

The German Bundesliga supplied 82 players at the World Cup, including Argentina defender Martin Demichelis of Bayern Munich. All 23 of Germany's squad were based at home.

55 SPAIN

Players from the Eredivise travelling to South Africa represented 13 different countries. They included midfielder Cheik Tiote of Ivory Coast, who plays for Dutch champions Twente.

47 FRANCE

26 players from the J.League were members of World Cup squads. They included 19 in Japan's squad as well as North Korea midfielder Jong Tae-se of Kawasaki Frontale.

33 HOLLAND

26 JAPAN

23 PORTUGAL

20 GREECE

leagues supplied the the 2010 World Cup

England's Premier League and Championship provided 113 players for 26 of the 32 squads, including Finalists Holland, who had Liverpool's Dirk Kuyt (left) and Man City's Nigel De Jong.

Five players from the Brazilian league played at the World Cup. They included Sebastian Abreu of Uruguay (Botafogo). Robinho (Santos) was the only Brazilian playing his football at home – and even he was on loan from Man City.

113 ENGLAND

5 BRAZIL

4 ROMANIA

6 ISRAEL

6 BELGIUM

7 SCOTLAND

7 USA

9 NEW ZEALAND

9 DENMARK

10 CHILE

10 SWITZERLAND

11 ARGENTINA

13 SOUTH KOREA

14 TURKEY

14 RUSSIA

17 SOUTH AFRICA

20 NORTH KOREA

20 MEXICO

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Growing up in New York

Thierry Henry's low-key arrival in MLS is a sure sign of football's increasing maturity in America

USA

PAUL GARDNER in New York

ASSESSING THE IMPACT of Thierry Henry on football in the United States is a difficult one. For a start, his signing for New York was more heralded abroad than in the US, where it was a decidedly low-key event, lacking in the feverish hype that accompanied – indeed preceded – the arrival of David Beckham.

Maybe that needs explaining. For a start the media, which seemed determined to paint Beckham as the world's greatest player as well as the saviour of the sport in America, has shown no such interest in Henry. And New York is not Los Angeles; all that glitzy Hollywood enthusiasm doesn't sit well with your average New Yorker, who prefers a "show me" attitude of hardened indifference until something actually gets done.

This may work to Henry's advantage as the distractions surrounding Beckham in LA have proved calamitous and there has been very little actual football from the England midfielder.

It's reasonable to expect much more, on the field, from Henry. On his debut he played only 45 minutes and did not exactly exert himself, but he did enough to score. The crowd was a satisfying 20,312 – some 7,000 more than a regular gate – but as this was an exhibition game against Tottenham Hotspur, nobody could work out who was there to see Henry and who had come to watch the Premier League team.

Here to win MLS title

Henry says he is here to play football and to win the MLS title. But while the hope is that he will develop a goalscoring partnership with Juan Pablo Angel, there was no immediate test of that idea against Spurs as Angel was injured and did not play.

What nobody yet knows is, does Henry have what it takes to become a New York sports star?

That will mean doing the glamour stuff on the field – scoring goals and helping the team to win – and doing it all with class. New York sports teams are expected to have a swagger about them, an air of superiority; it is what the rest of the country loves to hate about the city.

The classic example are the New York Yankees baseball team,

Low-key arrival...Henry signs autographs before his New York debut against Tottenham

Lucky number...just as he did at Arsenal and Barcelona, Henry will wear the no14 shirt for New York this season

who, while not as dominant as they used to be, are still a force to be reckoned with and are still a huge draw wherever they play.

The Yankees, in short, are a sports dynasty. There has been much discussion in the US over whether dynasties are a good thing for sports; football is by now used to the argument of whether having two or three powerful clubs in a league who share the title year after year heightens interest or merely kills off competition.

MLS, with its single entity structure, is designed to ensure parity among its clubs. But this is thought to be leading to a lack of excitement, hence the arrival of "Designated Players" (DPs) who are paid outside the salary cap to allow clubs to bring in stars.

The scheme has had mixed results. Some DPs – Angel at New York and Cuauhtemoc Blanco in Chicago – have been big hits. Others, such as Luis Landin at Houston and Denilson for Dallas – have been flops. Freddie Ljungberg was a great success in his first year, 2009, with Seattle Sounders, but has now fallen out of favour.

When Henry joined New York, they were lying in second place in the Eastern Division – a satisfactory standing, but the team were hardly convincing and lacked flair. It is no easy task for one player to transform a team, but that is what Henry will be expected to do. The club – and their predecessor, MetroStars – have been in existence for 15 years and are yet to win anything. The team's Swedish coach, Hans Backe, is realistic enough to say: "One player cannot change the team totally. He needs his team-mates around him to feed him."

Those team-mates are a decidedly mixed bunch, both ethnically and in terms of skill level.

There is the popular but erratic goalkeeper Bouna Condoul from Senegal, while among the defenders are Costa Rica's Roy Miller and four Americans: Mike Petke, Carlos Mendes, Chris Albright and Tim Ream. Midfield features Estonia's Joel Lindpere, Carl Robinson of Wales and Ohio-born Seth Stammler, plus a couple of speedy wingers in Danleigh Borman from South Africa and Jamaica's Dane Richards from Jamaica. Up front, Angel's partner is one of two tall, rangy forwards: either Macoumba Kandji from Senegal or Salou Ibrahim from Ghana.

Mistake...MetroStars' import Matthaus

Losing start...Henry was on target as New York lost 2-1 to Spurs

Pressure...Henry must prove the critics wrong

Obvious downside

The only obvious downside to the signing of Henry is simply that he is French, and there is no community of French supporters who will rush to Red Bull Arena to see him.

Now, if New York could find a popular Mexican to sign, he would attract large numbers of fans from the huge Mexican community in the metropolitan area. While each MLS team is allowed two DPs – that's Angel and Henry at New York – they can, in effect, purchase a third DP spot by paying the league a "luxury tax" of US$250,000.

Immediately after Henry arrived, rumours started that New York were hot on the trail of Mexico's Rafa Marquez, who is apparently no longer wanted at Barcelona. Marquez looked like an almost perfect signing for the team, both in terms of boosting attendances and in organising a frequently precarious defence.

Of course there are doubters who suspect that the Henry signing will go south in a hurry. They point to the Beckham travesty, but they have had a another screw-up, much closer to home, to ponder.

In 2000, Lothar Matthaus arrived, full of fine words for MetroStars, declaring – like Henry – how much he loved New York. However, the move turned into a colossal disaster, with Matthaus quickly showing that he found the attractions of New York City much more alluring than playing football. He departed after one season, leaving an achievement of no goals and just three assists.

Henry has been given plenty of time to settle in, with his four-year contract not finishing until 2014, by which time he will be 36. While it is vital that his immediate contribution be felt on the field in an improvement in the quality of New York's play, he also brings long-term, intangible benefits to the team and to MLS.

The fact that he has been signed is an important statement from New York's owners that they have confidence in MLS, and it comes on top of their heavy investment in the building of the club's stadium – which is certainly the best of its kind in the country. A successful stay by Henry will also help validate the DP concept, which in turn will encourage other teams to bring in star players – at the moment, only seven of the 16 MLS clubs have DPs.

In short, the expectations that surround Henry appear to be much less glittering and much more realistic than those that accompanied Beckham, and that fact alone is a sign of maturity among America's football leaders.

And that growing maturity is the thing that may help Henry to avoid the damaging distractions that derailed both Matthaus and Beckham. ●

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Put your shirt on me...Menezes takes his first media conference as federation president Teixeira looks on

Selecao soap opera

Mano Menezes is the new national coach after others turned the job down

TIM VICKERY in Rio de Janeiro

IF DUNGA'S REPLACEMENT by Mano Menezes as coach of the *Selecao* were to be told in the form of a soap opera, the first episode takes place before the World Cup.

After eight years away, Luiz Felipe Scolari decided that the time had come to return home. Before flying off to do media work in South Africa, he made a point of agreeing to coach Palmeiras – a move that can only be interpreted as a deliberate measure to rule himself out of the Brazil job.

But if Scolari does not want to coach the national team now, in two years' time, in the run-up to the World Cup on home soil, he may well be interested – and as the overwhelming people's choice for the job, the shadow of Scolari will be hanging over Menezes.

The second episode happens when the team arrive home after their quarter-final defeat by Holland. Dunga had always assumed that, win or lose, his time in charge would come to an end once the World Cup campaign was over. Back in Porto Alegre, though, he hinted at a desire to stay on and the Brazilian FA (CBF) were stung into action. Within hours they published

on their website a declaration sacking him and his entire back-up staff. CBF president Ricardo Teixeira made it very clear he blamed Dunga's histrionics for Brazil's astonishing second-half emotional collapse against the Dutch.

Spiritual guardians

Brazil's status as spiritual guardians of the beautiful game is beginning to look in danger – not from two successive World Cup quarter-final defeats, but from an excess of pragmatic, counter-attacking football and a deficiency of midfield magic.

If this was seen as a problem, then Leonardo would have been the most interesting candidate. Glamorous and articulate, with a commitment to attack and a fair season at Milan behind him, he would have been a PR coup for the CBF in terms of the international image of the Brazil team.

This, however, was clearly low on the list of priorities as they offered the job to Muricy Ramalho, the most successful domestic coach of recent times, but also an arch pragmatist with little interest in stylish play.

At the Maracana on the night of Thursday, July 22, after his Fluminense side had just gone top of the Brazilian league, Ramalho received the invite. The next day he met Teixeira, who proclaimed him the best man for the job. It seemed done and dusted.

But before Friday was out there was a problem.

Less than two years ago, after winning his third consecutive league title with Sao Paulo, Ramalho gave an interview to FIFA in which he described the idea of turning down the Brazil job as "a joke". But he now did just that – and the CBF were not laughing after being left looking stupid and lapping up criticism from the local media.

> **"Ramalho once gave an interview to FIFA in which he described the idea of turning down the Brazil job as a joke. But now he's done just that – and the CBF are not laughing"**

Fluminense refused to release Ramalho from his contract, though he could still have walked and a compensation claim negotiated. But it would be naive to expect such loyalty to run both ways. After a run of bad results, Fluminense are liable to sack Ramalho without a minute's thought – they have done it to plenty of others.

Ramalho has said that contracts should be kept and that he needs to give an example to his children by honouring his agreement with Fluminense. It sounds like an attempt to claim the moral high ground, but it may be more realistic to believe he was wary of walking into a trap. The great midfielder Falcao took over after the 1990 World Cup with a similar rebuilding brief, but when his young side suffered defeats he was soon replaced. With Scolari waiting in the wings, Ramalho was perhaps reluctant to play the part of the fall guy.

Humiliated, the CBF quickly moved on to Plan B. Corinthians coach Menezes was offered the job on that Friday night and announced his acceptance the following morning, with the CBF quickly paying tribute to his courage.

Combative style

A lower-league centre-back in his playing days, Menezes, 48, coached minor clubs before hitting the big time in the last five years with Gremio and Corinthians. Like Dunga and Scolari, he is from the south of the country, where mass European immigration has left its mark with a preference for a combative style of football. In Menezes' case, however, the tough marking is typically accompanied by a promising commitment to all-round midfield play. He has won admirers for his calm temperament, but that even keel will be sorely tested by the pressures of his new job.

In 10 visits to the Maracana stadium – the likely venue of the 2014 World Cup Final – Menezes has yet to register a victory. If he could write his own script, he will put that right when it most matters. But before then there are sure to be plenty of twists and turns in the soap opera plotline. ●

Waiting game...Scolari, newly appointed as Palmeiras coach, could be back in the national job before 2014

At the crossroads

After Asia's best-ever overseas World Cup, where does the region's game go from here?

MICHAEL CHURCH in Hong Kong

WITH TWO TEAMS making it through to the knockout phase, and with a total of four wins across the tournament, South Africa 2010 was Asia's most successful World Cup other than that achieved on "home turf" in Japan and South Korea in 2002.

Not surprisingly, it was South Korea who spearheaded the charge once again. After their performances in the months leading up to the World Cup, big things had been expected of Huh Jung-moo's side ahead of the tournament – and, with Park Ji-sung leading the way, the Taeguk Warriors did not disappoint, picking up a deserved win over Greece and a draw with Nigeria that took them into the second round for the first time on foreign soil.

However, defeat against Uruguay ended any hope of emulating that famous run to the last four in 2002 in a section of the draw that gave them the opportunity to do so.

"There are some things we need to improve on to compete at international level," said Huh. "The result didn't go the way we wanted but my players gave their all.

"Uruguay were just fortunate enough to get those goals. We played very well but we ought to have played a bit more intelligently."

But while South Korea's progress was perhaps anticipated, the same could not be said of Japan.

Takeshi Okada's side were in turmoil before the finals, with the coach offering to resign after a loss at home to South Korea days before the squad's departure for a pre-tournament training camp.

Yet that defeat gave Okada the wake-up call he needed. After sticking rigidly to the same players and the same system throughout his two-and-a-half-year tenure, the former Yokohama F.Marinos tactician made the changes necessary to succeed.

Out went the one-paced Shunsuke Nakamura and the inexperienced full-back Atsuto Uchida, along with forward Keiji Tamada, as Okada rung the changes. Instead of an out-and-out striker, he used Keisuke Honda as the fulcrum of the attack and Daisuke Matsui on the right.

The changes worked and Japan racked up their first World Cup finals win overseas, with Honda scoring the winner in the opening game against Cameroon. That was followed up with a measured and mature performance against Denmark that saw Okada's side progress to the second round.

A similar showing against Paraguay in the second phase would have given Japan a very real chance of progressing to the quarter-finals, but an insipid and lacklustre showing – more akin to their pre-tournament performances than their previous three in South Africa – saw them exit on penalties.

"It's been a great pleasure for me to work with these fantastic players and staff members," said Okada. "This team was so wonderful I really wanted them to have just one more game.

"All of them fought hard, worked hard and played to bring success to the team. This team is certainly in the top two I have coached. They performed with pride as representatives of Japan and with the spirit of the Japanese that they have inherited. I am extremely proud of them."

Goal difference

Despite Australia's win over Serbia, Pim Verbeek's side exited the competition on goal difference after an opening round 4-0 defeat by Germany and a draw with eventual quarter-finalists Ghana.

Had it not been for Tim Cahill's sending off against Germany and Harry Kewell's red card in the Ghana game, the Socceroos may have made it three Asian teams in the last 16.

The continent's fourth team, North Korea, put up a solid fight against Brazil before succumbing heavily against Portugal and then restoring some pride with a respectable showing against an Ivory Coast side in desperate need of goals.

With Huh, Okada and Verbeek all standing down after the finals, some difficult decisions now need to be made. South Korea and Japan have been here before, appointing new coaches in the aftermath of 2002.

Bench lift...Honda, hailing his goal against Cameroon, was a key player for Japan

> **"This team is certainly in the top two I have coached. I am extremely proud of them"**
>
> *Takeshi Okada signs off as Japan coach with a tribute to his squad*

After their run to the World Cup semi-finals that year, the Korea FA appointed Humberto Coelho – only to fire the Portuguese coach little more than a year later after he failed to match the expectation levels raised by the success of predecessor Guus Hiddink.

As for Japan, the decision to appoint Brazil legend Zico saw the team fail to make the anticipated progress over the following four years.

Like the Koreans, Australia also know what life is like post-Hiddink as they struggled for stability after his departure in 2006. Interestingly, Football Federation Australia chairman Frank Lowy has indicated Verbeek's replacement will be one of the 31 other coaches who were working in South Africa at the finals.

Despite the managerial upheaval, one thing is certain: whoever takes charge of South Korea, Japan and Australia will have limited time to work with their new side ahead of the Asian Cup in Qatar.

But with confidence high in Japan and South Korea, both are sure to be among the favourites when the finals begin in January. ●

Glory road...fans line the streets of Montevideo to welcome home the Uruguay squad from South Africa

Side effects

Will the World Cup success of *La Celeste* have any impact on the domestic game?

URUGUAY

REX GOWAR

WORLD CHAMPIONS twice in the first half of the 20th century yet often vilified for their negativity in the second half, Uruguay are currently revelling in the recovery of a little of their former status after reaching the World Cup semi-finals.

The success of Oscar Tabarez's team has restored some faith to a country of 3.5 million people which produces the highest proportion of top-flight footballers per capita but has relied for too long on the prowess of a few individuals to keep its name in the bigger world picture.

In gratitude, thousands of fans, proud of a team that finished fourth after only securing the last berth at the finals by the skin of their teeth in November, turned out to give player of the tournament Diego Forlan and his team-mates a heroes' welcome on their return.

However, whether the seeds of success that were planted four years earlier with the appointment of Tabarez on a four-year World Cup cycle will flourish is the bigger question facing Uruguayans as the new season beckons for the impoverished domestic game.

The key to that will be how the Uruguayan Football Association invest their World Cup prize money.

The cream of Uruguayan football will continue to ply their trade with clubs in Europe, Mexico or other, richer South American leagues such as Brazil, Argentina or Chile. But last season held some hope for improvement on the home front with a resurgence of the country's two biggest clubs, Nacional and Penarol.

Nacional were the dominant team of 2009 and under coach Eduardo Acevedo they won the apertura in December with a strong defence in which towering, blond 19-year-old centre-back Sebastian Coates stood out as a real prospect. His inexperience showed, however, when he made the step up to the national team for the World Cup play-off against Costa Rica and subsequently missed out on what had been a probable place in Tabarez's squad for South Africa.

Penarol, five-times Libertadores champions but who had not won a domestic title since 2003, took charge in the clausura with Diego Aguirre at the helm. He steered them to a record run in which his side won their opening 12 games and ended up unbeaten, dropping a mere two points in their 15 matches.

At the heart of the Penarol side, which clinched the overall title by beating Nacional in the play-offs, was 28-year-old midfielder Egidio Arevalo, whose fine form earned him a belated place in Tabarez's squad.

> **"Opponents will have a new worry because they are going to face a Penarol side that are champions"**
>
> *Penarol's new coach Manuel Keosseian*

New coaches

Despite their successes, Penarol and Nacional both began the new season with new coaches. Manuel Keosseian, who joined Penarol from Guatemalan club Municipal, arrived saying: "The fans continue to be enthused and opponents have a new worry because they are going to face, at local as well as international level, a Penarol side that are champions.

"I'd like to see a Penarol side like that of the last six months, repeating what they did during that spell...we'll try to have Penarol dictate the game with a clear plan."

At Nacional, Luis Gonzalez was promoted from coach of the youth teams and he is unlikely to change the style of the senior side.

"Winning gives us all prestige but, more than winning, what I'd like to be remembered for at Nacional is the way we play," said Gonzalez.

On the playing side, former national team forward Fabian Estoyanoff returned to Penarol from Panionios of Greece while midfielder Sergio Orteman left for Queretaro in Mexico. Over at Nacional, striker Mario Regueiro earned himself a move to Lanus of Argentina. ●

Golden boy...Uruguay World Cup hero Forlan (centre)

Presidential decree

Laurent Blanc, in his first act as national coach, dropped all 23 members of the World Cup squad from his first selection

INCOMING NATIONAL coach Laurent Blanc must have been asking himself what kind of storm he'd inadvertently walked into when the story first broke from Knysna.

The 23-man France squad had already disgraced itself out on the pitch in South Africa by eking out a soulless draw with Uruguay and then capitulating to Mexico. But the lame performances were nothing compared to the shame when – on Sunday, June 20, just two days before the crucial final group game against the host nation – they refused to train in a show of supposed solidarity with striker Nicolas Anelka.

The Chelsea striker had been kicked out of the squad for unleashing a foul-mouthed tirade against coach Raymond Domenech at half-time against Mexico. The subsequent refusal of the players to kick a ball in anger provoked enormous indignation throughout French society.

Why were these idiots refusing to honour the sacred blue shirt? Didn't they have any pride in representing their country? Were they so bloated with backside-licking indulgences and overstuffed bank accounts that they really no longer knew, much less cared, how regular people felt?

Regardless of the rights and wrongs of the action taken, there is no doubt that this was French football's lowest moment. Yes, even lower than the underage prostitution scandal that is still rumbling on in the background.

Blanc had already agreed to leave his position as coach of Bordeaux and take up the reins from the beleaguered Domenech long before this particular debacle – even if his appointment was not yet official. But there's no way he could have been expecting to find things in such abject disarray.

> **"I would like to see the players heavily sanctioned and Patrice Evra banned from the national team indefinitely"**
>
> *Lilian Thuram*

Since the events of June 20, and France's subsequent elimination from the World Cup without winning a single game, it seems that anyone and everyone connected with French football has been given a platform to voice their opinion on Knysna-gate. Before retiring from international football and hopping off to the USA to see out his playing career, Thierry Henry said that "with the benefit of hindsight and given the reaction the actions provoked, you could say that yes, it was a mistake".

Les Bleus captain Patrice Evra – who was filmed in Knysna getting a verbal broadside from Robert Duverne, the fitness coach who threw away his World Cup accreditation in disgust at the players' actions – claimed that his team-mates "stayed united to the end...there wasn't a single person who wanted to get off the bus".

Heroes of 1998

However, one of the heroes of the 1998 World Cup victory, Lilian Thuram, who is now involved with the French Football Federation (FFF), had a very different point of view.

"I would like to see the players heavily sanctioned and Patrice Evra banned from playing for the national team indefinitely," said Thuram.

"When you're captain you have responsibilities and you need to respect the shirt."

Opinions, opinions. But the most important opinion of them all, of course, was that of Blanc. Yet it wasn't until his first official press conference, on July 6, that he expressed his thoughts on the whole sorry affair.

Guarded and visibly nervous, he preferred to concentrate on the composition of his back-room staff, and the usual incomer's platitudes and rallying calls. He did say, though, that he wasn't interested in acting as a hangman in the light of the South African mutiny. But rumours soon began to emerge that Blanc did have a radical plan in mind: not to select any of the 23 players who had formed the World Cup squad for France's next match, a friendly against Norway in Oslo on August 11.

In the hot seat...Blanc

The football federations's general meeting on July 23 turned out to be one to remember. First, president Jean-Pierre Escalettes officially stepped down in a public acknowledgement of at least some personal culpability for the Knysna debacle, with Fernand

Duchaussoy, the former head of the French amateur leagues, elected as interim president. Then Blanc officially put forward his non-selection idea – a proposal that was immediately and unanimously accepted, and then quickly relayed to the media.

It clearly constituted a very public slap on the wrists for the players. How players such as Karim Benzema, Samir Nasri and Hatem Ben Arfa – who were all shock omissions from Domenech's World Cup squad – must be relieved that they never made the cut!

Meanwhile, in one of his last important acts as president, Escalettes put together a three-man team charged with running an in-depth inquiry into exactly how things got so out of hand in South Africa and who was to blame.

They will speak with as many of those involved as possible; their results will be delivered later this month, when it will be down to Duchaussoy to decide which individuals should face further sanctions.

Clearly there is a need for matters to be resolved satisfactorily, but it must also be done quickly. France begin their qualification campaign for Euro 2012 on September 3 at home to Belarus, followed by a trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina four days later. In order for Blanc to be able to work in the best possible circumstances he needs to know which players – if any – are to be punished further.

It's all an unholy mess, of course, and just about the worst possible circumstances in which a new coach could take control. Yet Blanc remains as he did throughout his brilliant playing career: calm and authoritative.

"I will respect the France team and do my utmost to make it respected," he says. "How? By staying true to the values I've always had. A dedication to sporting excellence and to standards of behaviour that are beyond reproach.

"I want to instil a spirit that's based on rigour, discipline and pleasure. Those things are not incompatible. Quite the opposite, in fact."

France waits with baited breath to see if the man they call *"Le President"* can pull it off, but there's no doubt there are some deep wounds to heal. ●

Toronto lead the way

The MLS team from Ontario are improving every season

CANADA

PHILIPPE GERMAIN in Montreal

PERFECT AT HOME, though struggling on the road, Toronto are finally showing signs of maturity on the pitch in their fourth season of existence in the MLS.

It took Scottish manager Mo Johnston three seasons, over 60 players and three head coaches to find the right man to lead the Canadian club forward, finally settling on Serbia-born Preki Radosavljevic, who spent the three previous campaigns at the helm of Chivas-USA.

Since his arrival at BMO Field, Preki has sent home Honduran striker Amado Guevara and traded defender Marvell Wynne and Welsh midfielder Carl Robinson. Building their team around Canada midfielders Dwayne De Rosario and Julian De Guzman, who was repatriated last year after four seasons in Spain with Deportivo La Coruna, Preki and Johnston have also added some Latin flair to the squad.

The arrival of Brazilian globe-trotter Maicon Santos and De Guzman's former Spanish team-mate Mista in July sparked plenty of excitement and, halfway through the season, Toronto are right in the thick of a race for a play-off spot – mainly due to an eight-game unbeaten streak, on top of which they clinched their second successive Canadian championship against Vancouver Whitecaps and Montreal Impact.

The two-time national champions hope this success will translate to the continental scene, with a CONCACAF Champions League qualifying round victory over Motagua of Guatemala set to open the door to the group phase alongside Arabe Unido of Panama, MLS side Real Salt Lake and, almost certainly, Mexicans Cruz Azul.

The weight of expectation in the Champions League has weighed heavily on Toronto ever since lower-tiered Montreal Impact came out of the group phase at their very first attempt in 2008. As is the case with other sports in the Queen City, TFC's claim to be Canada's top team is doomed to fail without any success on the field to tag along.

Committed...Toronto's Brazilian Maicon Santos (right) mixes it with Ugo Ihemelu of Dallas

> "Preki and Johnston have added some Latin flair to the Toronto squad"

Rejuvenation operation

Vancouver Whitecaps are keen to win some silverware before they join MLS in 2011. The West Coast club are one of the leading sides in the USSF D2, North America's second tier, where they play fellow forthcoming MLS members Montreal Impact, who are set to make the jump in 2012.

The Caps have been among the table's top three all season despite a rejuvenation operation led by coach Teitur Thordarson, club president Bob Lenarduzzi and the technical staff.

The departure of midfielders Ricardo Sanchez from Mexico and Northern Ireland's Jonny Steele, as well as the return to England of Canada international Marcus Haber, who was on loan from West Bromwich Albion, has made room for faster and younger players, including 19-year-old Congolese striker Ridge Mobulu signed from Swiss side Lausanne-Sport, 22-year-old Tanzania midfielder Nizar Khalfan and 21-year-old St. Vincent & Grenadines striker Cornelius Stewart.

However, things are not so rosy for Montreal Impact, who won the Canadian championship in 2008 and the USL First Division in 2009. The Quebec-based side are struggling to find form under the leadership of coach Marc Dos Santos.

The departures of Italian defender Stefano Pesoli and veteran Panama striker Roberto Brown have led to the arrival of the massive St Vincent central defender Wesley Charles and the return of former Impact players Ali Gerba and Antonio Ribeiro, but these arrivals have yet to put the team back on course for a fourth play-off title in their 17-year history.

Meanwhile, the national team, fresh from a summer of public questioning about yet another absence from the World Cup, begin the long trek towards qualification for the 2014 tournament by hosting friendlies against Peru in Toronto on September 4 and Honduras in Montreal on September 7. ●

Staying afloat

The Madives have enjoyed international success despite all their disadvantages

MALDIVES

STEVE MENARY

FEW FOOTBALLING countries face the problems of players in the Maldives. Comprised of nearly 1,200 islets – of which only around 200 inhabited – the Maldives is one of the most disparate nations in the world.

"There are so many islands in the Maldives and transportation is a big issue," admits Mohammed Shiyaz, a referee from the islands. "It costs a lot to travel."

Around a third of the country's 300,000 population live on the capital Male, and space was already an issue long before global warming began to make the prospect of the entire nation being submerged quite possible during this century.

"The biggest problem we face is the lack of training facilities," adds Shiyaz. "There are not enough practice fields because there is no space in Male."

There are, however, about 120 football clubs in the Maldives. Teams from each island play against each other, with the winners and runners-up progressing to a zonal competition run across eight regions. The winners then go to Male for the finals.

On Male, there are three divisions, and the top flight – the Dhiraagu Dhivehi League – is semi-professional, with most players getting paid but still needing other jobs.

VB Sports won the 2009 title and lead the pack this year, ahead of Victory SC, who won last year's FA Cup and the President's Cup.

Both clubs represented the Maldives in this year's Asian Cup, with VB bringing in three overseas players – Dutch pair Ahmet Kelic and Husein Cengiz, and Ayao Agbokousse from Togo – and six national squad players in an attempt to emulate New Radiant, who made the semi-finals in 2005.

VB also tried the novel approach of getting players to sell tickets for their games to raise support.

"Our primary target is to qualify for the second round," said VB chief executive Ibrahim Gahthan. "We are hoping to continue our winning momentum and crowd support will help in achieving this."

> **"Space was already an issue long before global warming began to make the prospect of the entire nation being submerged during this century a possibility"**

On the up...Mohamed Umair (left) of the Maldives beats Afghanistan's Zohib Islam

VB began with a 3-2 win in Indonesia over Persiwa Wamena and won two further games, but they missed Gathan's target, finishing third behind Hong Kong side South China AA and Thailand's Muangthong United. Victory SC finished bottom of their four-team group which won by Indonesian side Sriwijaya.

Defying its problems

The 21,000 capacity National Stadium in the capital is the country's only FIFA-standard ground and it stages internationals and the AFC Cup fixtures – though the crowds did not reach the 8,000 to 10,000 that Gathan hoped for.

Yet somehow football is the Maldives defies all its problems.

In the same year that New Radiant embarked on their ground-breaking AFC Cup run, the national team – known as the Red Snappers – reached the semi-finals of the eight-team South East Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship, and in 2006 they were a record 126 in FIFA's rankings.

The ageing but popular Slovak coach Joseph Jankech laid the foundations for the Red Shark's success in a three-year period, starting in 2001. He returned in 2007 for another one-year spell, prompting further success as the Maldives beat India to win the 2008 SAFF title for the first time, in a tournament co-hosted with Sri Lanka.

Staged irregularly, the next SAFF Championship, in Bangladesh, saw the Maldives reached the Final once again, but this time India got their revenge, winning on penalties.

The star of the 2008 title win was VB striker Ali Ashfaaq. Known as "Dhagey", he was voted the tournament's most valuable player and retained that title in 2009.

With offers to play in India, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand, overseas success for "Dhagey" would be a huge boost to the profile of a nation battling so many problems. ●

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Opposition...Dodik ordered Bosnian Serbs to vote against the election of a single federation president

Isolation looming

Club sides and the national team face expulsion from international competition

BOSNIA & HERZGOVINA

ZDRAVKO REIC

BOSNIAN TEAMS are being threatened with expulsion from international competition after the country's federation failed to agree to changes demanded by UEFA and FIFA.

European football's governing body had called on the Football Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (N/FSBiH) to elect a single president and end its controversial, ethnic-based tripartite presidency.

For the past 16 years, since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia's federation has reflected the complex ethnic make-up of the country, with three federation presidents: Sulejman Colakovic (Bosnian), Bogdan Ceko (Serbian) and Iljo Dominkovic (Croatian) representing the country's three ethnic communities of Muslims and Serbs and Croats.

At the most recent meeting of the federation in Sarajevo, 27 of 56 delegates voted in favour of a single, elected president, but a two-thirds majority was required to implement any change.

Disappointed UEFA representatives Allan Hansen and Marcel Benz left the meeting insisting sanctions were likely to be issued after the 18 Serbian delegates had heeded the call of their prime minister, Milorad Dodik, and opposed the change.

Dodik, who wants complete autonomy for Republic Srpska, has opposed any move towards unification within Bosnia and Herzegovina, and says: "The best thing for us would be to play our own championship."

For UEFA and FIFA, such an attitude represents a clear government interference in football matters – something they take a strong line on. With the N/FSBiH relying heavily on UEFA for 40 per cent of its funding, any sanction could force the federation into bankruptcy.

Hopes were high

The threat of international isolation could not have come at a worse time for Bosnia's national team. After losing out to Portugal in a play-off for the 2010 World Cup, hopes were high ahead of the Euro 2010 qualifying campaign.

"Our players are more experienced now and we all believe that we can succeed in the next round of qualifiers," said national coach Safet Susic. "But people that lead the federation are concerned for their places more than for the good of football."

For years the national team was weakened by infighting between the country's different groups and as many as 15 players refused national call-ups.

Things changed when former Croatia coach Miroslav Blazevic took over the national team. Almost single-handedly, he achieved unification through the force of his personality, but it turned out to be a false dawn.

Susic has a tough task in front of him after succeeding Blazevic and he was heavily criticised after two friendly defeats – 4-2 by Sweden and 3-1 by Germany – just before the World Cup.

"We have players who are winning trophies with the best European teams," said former international Sergej Barbarez. "Dzeko, Misimovic, Papac, Salihovic and others are ready for the big stage. However, they need to be brought together..."

Susic could do without criticism from someone like Barbarez, who has ambitions to be coach, but more worrying is the threat of international isolation. ●

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One of many...City new boy Silva

City versus the rest

Manchester City have again laid down the challenge to their rivals with ambitious summer spending, says Gavin Hamilton

> "No other club has come close to matching City's outlay"

IT'S BEEN Manchester City against the rest in this summer's transfer market. While it's not quite a case of the haves against the have-nots – the other clubs have, after all, spent in excess of £60million – City's spending has dwarfed the competition and looks set to break through the £100m barrier for the first time.

With more than £70m invested so far in David Silva, Yaya Toure, Jerome Boateng and Aleksandar Kolarov, City could create a new English record for the total amount spent in one summer with the purchase of Italian striker Mario Balotelli from Internazionale. They were also negotiating a price in the region of £25m with Aston Villa for England midfielder James Milner.

No other club has come close to matching City's outlay. Only Arsenal, who have invested £18m in Bordeaux striker Marouane Chamakh and Lorient defender Laurent Koscielny, have spent big money, as most clubs have paid smaller fees or none at all.

"It's been the quietest off-season I've ever seen," says Tottenham Hotspur boss Harry Redknapp. "Nobody's got any money, nobody seems to be spending, apart from Man City. They're the only team with any money to spend. Everybody else is sitting tight."

The lack of transfer activity was reflected in the summer's managerial changes. Only three appointments were made – Mark Hughes replacing Liverpool-bound Roy Hodgson at Fulham and Avram Grant taking over at West Ham United – with all three designed to bring some stability to difficult circumstances.

Hodgson will need to put his vast experience to good use in organising a Liverpool squad that is likely to lose Javier Mascherano to Inter, and possibly Fernando Torres to Chelsea.

Off the pitch, Liverpool have huge financial problems, with the banks looking to recover the £300m debt from co-owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett.

Fulham turned to former Man City manager Hughes as a replacement for Hodgson after ex-Spurs manager Martin Jol spurning their advances and opted to stay at Ajax.

Interesting reaction

One of the most interesting themes of this season will be the reaction of fans to those England players who underperformed at the World Cup.

The Premier League, already struggling to get bums on expensive seats, was seen as a contributing factor in England's dreadful showing, so any further decline in attendances will be taken as proof that supporters are voting with their chequebooks.

For the moment though, the only chequebook that matters is the one

being used in Manchester to fund City's spending spree. But their top-heavy squad will also present a potential problem for manager Roberto Mancini before the close of the transfer window.

New Premier League rules require clubs to name 25-man squads that must include at least eight "home-grown" players under the age of 21. City have a number of big-name players – such as Craig Bellamy, Roque Santa Cruz – who are unlikely to make the 25 and will therefore be unable to play in the Premier League, unless they can be sold or loaned out before the September 1 deadline.

This season promises to be the most open championship race for some time, with City entertaining serious ambitions of breaking into the top four. Add Liverpool's desire to return to the Champions League and Tottenham's determination to consolidate their position, and something will have to give. ●

Kop boss...Hodgson

FIVE TO WATCH

Prolific...Boselli

New start...Cole

United's "little pea"...Hernandez

Challenge...Hart

● MAURO BOSELLI
(Wigan Athletic)
A prolific goalscorer in Argentinian football and the Libertadores Cup over the past two seasons. May take time to find his feet, but he is further proof of Wigan's ambitious scouting policy.

● JOE COLE
(Liverpool)
Signed on a free transfer from Chelsea, he will be looking to bounce back from a disappointing World Cup, where Fabio Capello was criticised for ignoring him. New Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson must find a way of playing Cole alongside Steven Gerrard.

● JAVIER HERNANDEZ
(Manchester United)
"Chicarito" (little pea) arrives from Mexican football with a reputation as a sharp finisher, prompting comparisons with Michael Owen. May need time to adapt but shows huge potential.

● JOE HART
(Manchester City)
The young keeper excelled on loan at Birmingham City last season but has now returned to Eastlands and faces a fight with Shay Given for the number one spot – another potential problem for England manager Capello.

● THEO WALCOTT
(Arsenal)
After being left out of England's World Cup squad, the young winger needs a good domestic season – or it may be time to move on from Arsenal.

Make or break...Walcott

Arsenal
Manager: Arsene Wenger
Key arrivals: Chamakh (Bordeaux), Koscielny (Lorient)
Key departures: Campbell (Newcastle), Eduardo (Shakhtar Donetsk), Gallas (released), Merida (Atletico Madrid), Senderos (Fulham), Silvestre (released)
Arsenal look to have resisted Barcelona's claims on Cesc Fabregas – for another season at least – and with Robin Van Persie fit again, they look good for a top-four finish.

Aston Villa
Manager: Martin O'Neill
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Bouma (released)
With James Milner unsettled by Manchester City, Ashley Young yet to commit his future and owner Randy Lerner tightening the budget, Villa risk slipping back into the mid-table pack.

Birmingham City
Manager: Alex McLeish
Key arrivals: Foster (Manchester United), Zigic (Valencia)
Key departures: Benitez (Santos Laguna), Carsley (Coventry), McSheffrey (Coventry), Queudrue (released), Vignal (released)
Beanpole striker Nikola Zigic will provide a new aerial option in attack, but it would be a major achievement to repeat last season's excellent ninth place.

Blackburn Rovers
Manager: Sam Allardyce
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Reid (West Bromwich Albion)
Europe will now be the target for a team that overachieved last season. League Cup success is probably more realistic.

Blackpool
Manager: Ian Holloway
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Bouazza (Arles-Avignon)
With the weakest squad in the division, the promoted play-off winners are favourites to go straight back down. Despite that, the quotable Holloway will be entertaining.

Bolton Wanderers
Manager: Owen Coyle
Key arrivals: Alonso (Real Madrid), Blake (Burnley), Petrov (Manchester City)
Key departures: none.
Coyle is trying to switch to a more attractive playing style, but Bolton risk being neither fish nor fowl.

Chelsea
Manager: Carlo Ancelotti
Key arrivals: Benayoun (Liverpool)
Key departures: Ballack (Bayer Leverkusen), Belletti (Fluminense), J Cole (Liverpool), Stoch (Fenerbahce)
Pound for pound the strongest squad in the division. The champions have reduced their wage bill with the departures of Michael Ballack and others, and Roman Abramovich will supply the cash for a big-name signing.

Everton
Manager: David Moyes
Key arrivals: Beckford (Leeds), Gueye (Strasbourg)
Key departures: Gosling (Newcastle), Ruddy (Norwich)
Europe remains the target for a team that was badly hit by injuries last season. Keeping hold of promising midfielders Jack Rodwell and Mikel Arteta will be a priority.

Fulham
Manager: Mark Hughes
Key arrivals: Senderos (Arsenal)
Key departures: Buchtmann (Koln), Nevland (Viking), Smalling (Manchester United)
Hughes arrived just in time after the failed approach to Ajax coach Martin Jol and will be keen to restore his reputation after being sacked by Man City last season.

Liverpool
Manager: Roy Hodgson
Key arrivals: J Cole (Chelsea), Jovanovic (Standard Liege), Shelvey (Charlton), Wilson (Rangers)
Key departures: Aurelio (released), Benayoun (Chelsea)
There have been major changes at Anfield. Hodgson will bring organisation and a settled starting XI, but Javier Mascherano and Fernando Torres will be hard to replace if they leave.

Manchester City
Manager: Roberto Mancini
Key arrivals: Boateng (Hamburg), Kolarov (Lazio), Silva (Valencia), Y Toure (Barcelona)
Key departures: Benjani (released), Bojinov (Parma), Petrov (Bolton), Sylvinho (released), Taylor (released)
After the biggest summer-spending spree in English football history, the pressure is on Mancini to deliver a top-four finish.

Manchester United
Manager: Alex Ferguson
Key arrivals: Hernandez (Guadalajara), Smalling (Fulham)
Key departures: Foster (Birmingham), Tosic (CSKA Moscow)
Low-key signings for United and much will depend, again, on the fitness of Wayne Rooney. Title contenders, as always.

Newcastle United
Manager: Chris Hughton
Key arrivals: Campbell (Arsenal), Gosling (Everton), Perch (Nottingham Forest)
Key departures: Butt (released)
Back in the top flight after just one season away with essentially the same team that got relegated. With no change in the club's ownership status, a relegation battle looms.

Stoke City
Manager: Tony Pulis
Key arrivals: Cuvelier (Portsmouth), Nash (Everton)
Key departures: Arismendi (Barnsley), Amdy Faye (released), Griffin (Reading), Simonsen (Sheffield United)
Hard to beat at home but their poor form on the road means 17th place will be deemed a success.

Sunderland
Manager: Steve Bruce
Key arrivals: Angeleri (Estudiantes), Bramble (Wigan), Mignolet (St Truiden), Riveros (Cruz Azul)
Key departures: Cana (Galatasaray), Murphy (Celtic)
The pressure is on Bruce to take Sunderland to the next level after last season's 13th-place finish, but they may struggle to make that improvement.

Tottenham Hotspur
Manager: Harry Redknapp
Key arrivals: Sandro (Internacional)
Key departures: none
A huge season for Spurs could be over before it has really begun if they fail to overcome the Champions League qualifying round. However, they remain strong contenders to consolidate their position in the top four.

West Bromwich Albion
Manager: Roberto Di Matteo
Key arrivals: Pablo (Atletico Madrid), Reid (Blackburn), Tamas (Auxerre)
Key departures: Koren (released)
Surprised many of their own fans with their swift promotion, but anything other than a relegation battle will be a surprise.

West Ham United
Manager: Avram Grant
Key arrivals: Barrera (Pumas), Hitzlsperger (Stuttgart)
Key departures: Franco (released)
Grant should bring some much needed stability after last season's upheavals, but they could still struggle.

Wigan Athletic
Manager: Roberto Martinez
Key arrivals: Alacaraz (Club Brugge), Al Habsi (Bolton), Boselli (Estudiantes)
Key departures: Bramble (Sunderland), Cywka (Derby), Melchiot (Umm Salal)
Threaten to be as unpredictable as last season: brilliantly entertaining one week, feeble the next.

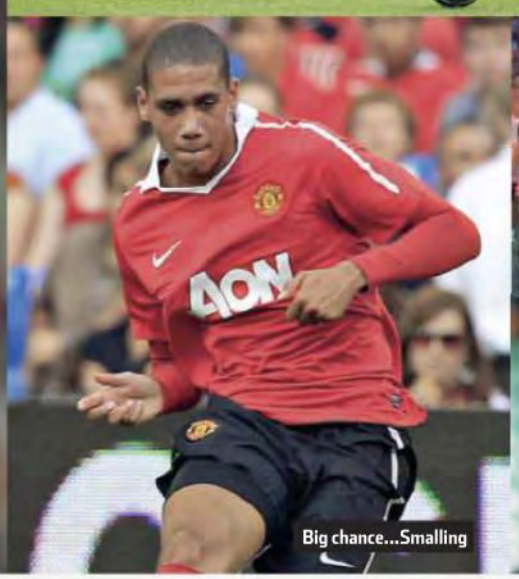
Wolverhampton Wanderers
Manager: Mick McCarthy
Key arrivals: Fletcher (Burnley), Hunt (Hull), Van Damme (Anderlecht)
Key departures: Iwelumo (Burnley), Surman (Norwich)
Some solid but unexciting signings suggest another season of honest toil but no more.

Giant jump...Beckford arrives at Everton from Leeds

Hammers man...Grant

Wanderer...Petrov

New Gunner...Koscielny (right)


Big chance...Smalling

Exciting...Holloway

Tall order...Zigic

Tough guy...Van Damme

Alone with his thoughts...Bordeaux's new coach Jean Tigana must solve the problems that led to the 2009 champions' freefall in the latter part of last season

Where's the excitement?

With few transfers in pre-season, the build-up to the new Ligue 1 season has been slow, says Howard Johnson

> **"The comings and goings of players have been eclipsed by the departure of Bordeaux manager Laurent Blanc to try to give back some pride to the national team"**

AFTER THE DISASTER that was France's 2010 World Cup campaign, a prostitution scandal, player revolts and some of the most anaemic performances ever turned in by the national side, the country's football fans have been more than happy to forget about *Les Bleus* and turn their attentions to a new domestic campaign.

Ligue 1 has benefited from Lyon's stranglehold being broken in the last two campaigns. Bordeaux's title triumph in 2009 and Marseille's victory this year have rekindled interest in a championship that has become less predictable and more open. The downside is that last season's competition won't go down as a classic. Marseille revelled in clinching their first title since 1992, but the truth is that there were too many average games and too few serious rivals for Didier Deschamps' men.

Will season 2010-11 provide us with more exciting football? We all hope so, but to tell the truth, excitement has been a wee bit hard to come by in the pre-season build-up. French football has suffered its own financial crisis and to that end transfer activity has been reserved rather than frenzied so far.

Indeed, the comings and goings of players have been rather eclipsed by the departure of Bordeaux manager Laurent Blanc, to try to give back some pride to the national team, and the arrival of his replacement, another former national hero, Jean Tigana. The first task for Tigana, who has been out of the game since leaving Besiktas in May 2007, will be to root out the problem that resulted in Bordeaux's domestic freefall after being knocked out of the Champions League by Lyon. They finished a disappointing sixth, 14 points behind Marseille.

The former Fulham man will have to mastermind a return to form without Marouane Chamakh, of course, after the 26-year-old Morocco striker left for Arsenal. For the moment Tigana has chosen not to replace him and hasn't added anyone of note to his inherited squad. He could have gone for Rennes striker Jimmy Briand, a regular Ligue 1 goalscorer in recent years, but the much-coveted 25-year-old opted for Lyon – where he will get Champions League football – for £5million.

Briand is the only marquee signing for manager Claude Puel, who allowed three big names to leave Gerland this summer. Mathieu Bodmer chose to head north to Paris Saint-Germain, Sidney Govou finally left for Greek champions Panathinaikos and Francois Clerc didn't have his contract renewed.

Marseille, meanwhile, have hardly been active in the transfer market either. Having slimmed down their playing staff by deciding not to renew the contracts of veterans Laurent Bonnart, Cyril Rool and Fernando Morientes, Deschamps has only brought in 20-year-old Spanish right-back Cesar Azpilicueta from Osasuna for a cool £7million. It's about quality rather than quantity according to the

club, who claim that Arsene Wenger had also been on the trail of the Spain Under-21 captain.

Auxerre finished last season a creditable third, earning a place in the qualifying stages of the Champions League. Manager Jean Fernandez has swapped one striker for another, bringing in former Liverpool man Anthony Le Tallec from Le Mans after Romanian Daniel Niculae opted to leave for Monaco.

Quality signings

Montpellier and Lille, who both qualified for the Europa League, have also been keen to emphasise the quality of their signings rather than the volume. Lille have brought in striker Moussa Sow from neighbours Rennes, while Montpellier landed giant forward Olivier Giroud from Ligue 2 Tours. Giroud, the second tier's top scorer last season with 21 goals, will replace Rennes-bound Colombian Victor Hugo Montano.

Paris Saint-Germain will celebrate their 40th anniversary in a red kit that matches the one they wore in their first campaign, while hoping to do way better than the 13th place finish they struggled to last season. Having signed Brazilian Nene – one of last season's best Ligue 1 performers – from Monaco, along with Bodmer, their midfield should pose more of a threat. But given PSG's penchant for underperforming it would be a brave man indeed who would bet on Antoine Kombouare's side mounting a serious title challenge.

An ABC trio of newcomers join the top flight, with Arles-Avignon, Brest and Caen replacing relegated Le Mans, Boulogne and Grenoble. It doesn't look as if it will be an easy campaign for any of the new boys.

Caen bounced back at the first time of asking after being relegated in 2009, but their squad looks a little thin. Brest are back for the first time in 19 years, but have virtually no top-flight experience in their ranks.

Arles-Avignon are by far the worst equipped to deal with their lofty status. With a budget of just £15m and an average attendance of only 4,141 last season, this is a club already punching massively above its weight. But add in a turbulent close season that saw the president leave and coach Michel Estevan relieved of his duties, only to be reinstated a week later, and it's no surprise they are overwhelming favourites to finish bottom of the pile. ●

FIVE TO WATCH

Point to prove...Briand

Shining star...Hazard

● JIMMY BRIAND
(Lyon)
A fleet-footed, quick-thinking striker who's been highly rated for some time. His move from Rennes to Lyon gives him the chance to prove he really can live up to the hype.

● EDEN HAZARD
(Lille)
The 19-year-old midfielder is bursting with talent and has already established himself as one of Ligue 1's most gifted players. This season will surely see this Belgian star shine even brighter.

● NENE
(Paris Saint-Germain)
The Brazilian midfielder was the standout player at Monaco last season. Now we'll see how he handles the pressure cooker atmosphere at PSG following his £4.5m move.

● GERVINHO
(Lille)
After an impressive showing at the World Cup with the Ivory Coast, the Lille striker is looking to earn a big-money move to England. If he performs at his best, then this should be his last season in France.

● YANN MVILA
(Rennes)
This powerful box-to-box midfielder was a surprise choice in France's original 30-man World Cup squad. If he continues his rapid progress in this season he'll be a major player.

Raising the stakes...Nene

Eye on England...Gervinho

Rapid progress...Mvila

ARLES-AVIGNON
Coach: Michael Estevan
Key arrivals: Ait Ben Idir (Le Havre), Bouazza (Blackpool), Najih (Clermont)
Key departures: Cirilli (Amiens), Dale (Unirea Urziceni), Esor (Clermont)
With a tiny budget and plenty of behind-the-scenes turbulence, it's hard to see anything but a swift return from whence Arles-Avignon came.

AUXERRE
Coach: Jean Fernandez
Key arrivals: Johnson (Amiens), Le Tallec (Le Mans)
Key departures: Martin (Courtrai), Niculae (Monaco), Tamas (West Bromwich Albion)
Fernandez worked miracles last season in bringing Champions League football to little Auxerre. A repeat performance would be even more incredible.

BORDEAUX
Coach: Jean Tigana
Key arrivals: Marange (Nancy)
Key departures: Chamakh (Arsenal), Jurietti (released), Placente (released)
A new coach and no big signings suggest that this will be a season of consolidation rather than one of serious trophy hunting for *Les Girondins*.

BREST
Coach: Alex Dupont
Key arrivals: Darlas (Panathinaikos), Deneuve (Chateuroux), Licka (Banik Ostrava), Micola (Banik Ostrava)
Key departures: Autret (Lorient), Fabien (Boulogne), Leroy (Cannes)
It's all about avoiding the drop. Brest are inexperienced at the top level so will need a good start and a large slice of luck to retain their top-flight status.

CAEN
Coach: Franck Dumas
Key arrivals: Hamouma (Laval), Lazarevic (OFK Belgrade), Marcq (Boulogne-sur-Mer)
Key departures: Dikamona (Le Havre), Florentin (Angers), Proment (Antalyaspur)
The best equipped of the three promoted sides, it will still be a hard struggle for Caen to avoid relegation. Recent experience of Ligue 1 in 2008-09 will help their cause, though.

LENS
Coach: Jean-Guy Wallemme
Key arrivals: Bergdich (Alfortville)
Key departures: Dindane (Lakhwiya), Guezoui (Niort), Laurenti (Arles-Avignon), Milovanovic (Red Star Belgrade)
Lens achieved their objective of survival on their return to the top flight last season with a respectable mid-table finish. Can they push on? Maybe, but not by much.

LILLE
Coach: Rudi Garcia
Key arrivals: Sow (Rennes)
Key departures: Butelle (Nimes), Ricardo Costa (Valencia), Vittek (Ankaragucu)
Lille's fourth-place finish last campaign will be hard to beat, but Garcia is a shrewd operator who knows how to get the best out of a talented squad. Expect LOSC to go well again.

LORIENT
Coach: Christian Gourcuff
Key arrivals: Coquelin (Arsenal), Ecuele Manga (Angers), Romao (Grenoble)
Key departures: Koscielny (Arsenal), Mansouri (Al Sailiya), Marchal (Saint-Etienne)
They've lost their best defender, Laurent Koscielny to Arsenal, but Lorient are now established in the top half of the table and there's no reason why that should change.

LYON
Coach: Claude Puel
Key arrivals: Briand (Rennes)
Key departures: Bodmer (Paris Saint-Germain), Clerc (released), Govou (Panathinaikos), Piquionne (West Ham)
If Jimmy Briand can hit the ground running and form a killer striking partnership with Lisandro Lopez, then Lyon should have the firepower to make themselves title contenders.

MARSEILLE
Coach: Didier Deschamps
Key arrivals: Azpilicueta (Osasuna)
Key departures: Bonnart (released), Kone (Lakhwiya), Morientes (released)
Deschamps is a shrewd operator and Marseille will be there or thereabouts when the prizes are given out. The only question mark is whether they have enough depth in the squad.

MONACO
Coach: Guy Lacombe
Key arrivals: Chabbert (Charleroi), Hansson (Rennes), Niculae (Auxerre)
Key departures: Ettori (Nimes), Modesto (Olympiakos), Nene (Paris Saint-Germain)
Lacombe toughened Monaco up last season and finishing eighth was a decent achievement. They have lost playmaker Nene, but they could still push on.

MONTPELLIER
Coach: Rene Girard
Key arrivals: Estrada (Universitad de Chile), Giroud (Tours), Kabze (Rubin Kazan)
Key departures: Carrasso (Rennes), Costa (Valencia), Montano (Rennes)
After an incredible season last time around it's going to be hard for Montpellier to better their fifth place finish in 2010. Anywhere in the top 10 should be considered a success.

NANCY
Coach: Pablo Correa
Key arrivals: Vahirua (Lorient)
Key departures: Dia (Fenerbahce), Marange (Bordeaux), Ouaddou (Lakhwiya)
Nancy haven't pulled up any trees in the last two seasons and coach Correa will need to haul the club out of mid-table obscurity if he's not to come under pressure. The problem is, has he the players to do it?

NICE
Coach: Eric Roy
Key arrivals: Pejcinovic (Rad Belgrade)
Key departures: Adu (Nordsjaelland), Apam (Rennes), Echouafni (retired)
Last season was a big disappointment for the Riviera club. If they lose star turn, striker Loic Remy – West Ham are leading the chase – as seems likely, then they could be in for another tough campaign.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
Coach: Antoine Kombouare
Key arrivals: Bodmer (Lyon), Nene (Monaco)
Key departures: Baning (Maccabi Tel-Aviv), Grondin (released), Letellier (Angers)
Predicting how PSG will do is like trying to catch mercury. They should be up there competing with the best, but have massively underachieved in recent times. Will this season be any different? Let's stick our necks out and say yes.

RENNES
Coach: Frederic Antonetti
Key arrivals: Apam (Nice), Carrasso (Montpellier), Dalmat (Sochaux), Mandjeck (Stuttgart), Montano (Montpellier)
Key departures: Briand (Lyon), Bocanegra (Saint-Etienne), Hansson (Monaco), Sow (Lille)
Rennes have been making steady progress and, despite Briand's departure, with a number of interesting new signings and a tough coach in Antonetti they could be the surprise package of the season.

SAINT-ETIENNE
Coach: Christophe Galtier
Key arrivals: Battles (Grenoble), Bocanegra (Rennes), Marchal (Lorient)
Key departures: Dabo (Sevilla), Mirallas (Olympiakos), Tavlaridis (Larissa)
Les Verts have gone for experience in the transfer market in an attempt to steady what has been a rocky ship in recent times. They may avoid a relegation battle, but look unlikely to achieve much more.

SOCHAUX
Coach: Francis Gillot
Key arrivals: Anin (Le Havre), Sauget (Grenoble)
Key departures: Dalmat (Rennes), Enza-Yamissi (Amiens), Stevanovic (Partizan Belgrade)
Sochaux won't have any of the big boys quaking in their boots and will be more concerned with looking over their shoulder to make sure they don't get dragged into a relegation battle.

TOULOUSE
Coach: Alain Casanova
Key arrivals: Ben Yedder (Alfortville), Gunino (Danubio), Larsen (Duisburg)
Key departures: Blondel (Troyes), Ebondo (released), Kazim-Kazim (Fenerbahce)
Toulouse lost a lot of ground last season after failing to find any kind of rhythm. Surely they have to do better this campaign, though it's unlikely they'll be genuine contenders for glory.

VALENCIENNES
Coach: Philippe Montanier
Key arrivals: Aboubakar (Coton Sport), Mfuyi (Servette), Pallois (Quevilly)
Key departures: Abardonado (released), Balde (released), Sebo (released)
A mid-table finish was a great result for the club last season. More of the same would represent nothing less than a triumph.

OM goal...Mamadou Niang (left) and Jordan Ayew

Happy now...but promoted Arles-Avignon will find Ligue 1 a struggle

Tug of change...Daniel Niculae (right) will strengthen Monaco

Same again please...Lille's Florent Balmont and coach Garcia want more European action

Lean on me...Rennes new striker Colombian Victor Hugo Montano (right)

Going up...Caen's Benjamin Nivet celebrates with coach Dumas

In at Valenciennes...Vincent Aboubakar

Paris match...Mathieu Bodmer

Saint-Etienne struggle...Galtier

Feels just like home...Michael Ballack sports his new Bayer Leverkusen kit as he talks to coach Jupp Heynckes after signing for his former club

Boom time

The Bundesliga is booming on the back of the national team's World Cup performance, says Nick Bidwell

> **As far as I am concerned I remain the captain of Germany. If Philipp (Lahm) sees it differently he has to speak with the coach**
>
> *Michael Ballack may have missed the World Cup but won't give up his post without a fight*

EXPECT GERMANY'S stylishly acquired World Cup bronze medal and fresh-faced new wave of talent to cement the Bundesliga's position as the most-watched league in Europe.

Able to boast of increases in top-flight attendances in each of the past eight years – average gates last term were a little over 42,000 – the Bundesliga has been packing them in for quite some time. And with Joachim Low's *Nationalmannschaft* putting on a first-class promotional show in South Africa, there should be even less spare spectator space on the domestic front this season.

Thanks to their part in the four-goal demolitions of Australia, England and Argentina, home-based heroes such as Golden Boot winner Thomas Muller, Mesut Ozil – provided he stays at Werder Bremen – Philipp Lahm and Bastian Schweinsteiger will figure among the must-see attractions. But none will spark as much interest over the next few months as Michael Ballack, who, in the most sensational transfer of the summer, left Chelsea for one of his former clubs, Bayer Leverkusen, on a Bosman free.

In many ways 33-year-old Ballack faces the biggest challenge of a long and glorious career. Once thought of as Germany's undisputed leader and midfield fulcrum, his absence from the World Cup because of an ankle injury seemed, if anything, to make the side stronger. And much to his dismay, calls for him to announce his international retirement are becoming more and more frequent.

Ballack, though, is having none of it, reacting angrily when Philipp Lahm chose to go public with his desire to carry on as skipper.

"As far as I'm concerned, I remain the captain of Germany," stormed Ballack. "There's no need for any discussion. If Philipp sees it differently, he has to speak with the coach.

"My motivation remains intact. My goal is to win trophies with Leverkusen and be fully involved at Euro 2012."

Despite the naysayers, Leverkusen are convinced Ballack still has much to offer – so much so that they have agreed to pay him between £12 and £15million over the next two seasons. The money will not come from the club's football budget but the corporate account of the Bayer pharmaceutical group.

Not only will Ballack make a

financial killing at his new club. He also will have more freedom on the pitch, with Leverkusen intent on using him further forward, arguing that the holding role he has filled in recent years for Chelsea and Germany is a straitjacket. In theory it makes sense to mine his undoubted goalscoring ability, but does he have the engine?

Wise old head

Another of Ballack's functions at Leverkusen will be serve as the wise old head in a sea of youthful exuberance, since, just like in the national team, the Bundesliga will be awash with home-grown ability.

In a decade, the percentage of under-23s in the league has gone from six to 15 per cent, and every club in the elite has its gems, its would-be World Cup glitterati. Take your pick from the likes of Bayern Munich full-back Diego Contento, Leverkusen attacking all-rounder Marcel Risse, Eintracht Frankfurt's box-to-box player Sebastian Rode or Mario Gotze, an attacking midfield creator from Borussia Dortmund.

With their 121 national training centres – where 10- to 17-year olds hone their skills – and excellent pro club academies, the German game has put in place a youth development system which is the envy of the world. Yet all that would come to nothing if coaches in the Bundesliga were not prepared to give the kids a chance in the elite competition and this, thank goodness, they are ever-willing to do.

Several reasons have contributed to the current rush to blood the inexperienced. Financial crises have proved the spur at Schalke and Dortmund, the dearth of good quality footballers in the Bundesliga's traditional recruitment areas in the Balkans and eastern Europe is another factor, while many coaches have simply come to swear by the freshness, lung power and sheer malleability of youth.

The lust for the Bundesliga is not only down to its competitiveness – three different champions (Bayern Munich, Wolfsburg and Stuttgart) in the last four years – state of the art stadia and dirt-cheap tickets (a terrace season ticket at Bayern, for example, is an incredible £109).

Equally important for the punters are the increasing numbers of locally sourced players, a generation with which they are more than happy to identify. ●

FIVE TO WATCH

Dynamic...Grosskreutz (front)

● KEVIN GROSSKREUTZ
Borussia Dortmund
Dynamic, perpetual motion attacking midfielder who swiftly established himself as one of the best young players in the country following a move from second division Rot Weiss Ahlen at the start of last season. So impressive was he that he won his first full cap in May against Malta.

Defensive rock...Kjaer

● SIMON KJAER
Wolfsburg
The excellent young Danish centre-back was widely-expected to leave Serie A side Palermo for a top address in the Premier League this summer, only for Wolfsburg chief executive Dieter Hoeness to persuade him that his future lay with the 2009 German champions. With one payment of £12 million the VW club's defence has gone from soft centre to fortress.

● CHRISTOPH METZELDER
Schalke
After three injury-plagued years at Real Madrid, the former national team central defender opted to return to the club he once turned out for as a youth. Too nice a guy for Schalke fans to object his past as the skipper of arch Ruhr rivals Borussia Dortmund.

Back home...Metzelder

● HEINZ MULLER
Mainz
Up until a year ago, when he arrived at Mainz from English second-tier side Barnsley, the thirty-something keeper had not featured in one Bundesliga fixture. But he quickly made up for lost time and in the eyes of many was the most accomplished stopper in the league last season.

Top No1...Muller

● MARCO REUS
Borussia Monchengladbach
This should be the season when the young winger or second striker becomes a household name. A brilliant dribbler, ever-improving finisher and a player born to up the tempo, he also finds the time to put in a defensive shift.

Dribble wizard...Reus (left) keeps Hamburg's Eljero Elia at bay

Bayer Leverkusen

Coach: Jupp Heynckes
Key Arrivals: Balitsch (Hannover), Ballack (Chelsea), Jorgensen (AB), Sam (Hamburg), Vida (Osijek)
Key Departures: Gekas (Frankfurt), Kroos (Bayern Munich), Zdebel (Aachen)
Unbeaten in their first 24 games last season only to fade in the final few laps of the title race, a young, thrusting and stylish side ultimately paid the price for a certain naivety. But no one can say they have not addressed that issue with the transfer coup of the summer: the return to the BayArena of Michael Ballack. Such a battle-hardened midfield focal point is just what the Rhinelanders need and – even with the creative genius that is Toni Kroos heading back to Bayern after his loan spell – the chances of making a Champions League spot remain bright.

Bayern Munich

Coach: Louis Van Gaal
Key Arrivals: Kroos (Leverkusen)
Key Departures: Lell (Hertha Berlin), Niedermeier (Stuttgart), Toni (Genoa)
With more internationals in their squad than any other club in the country, a clutch of World Cup 2010 illuminaries – notably Philipp Lahm, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Thomas Muller and Arjen Robben – and a permanently dissatisfied coach ready to spit fire and brimstone if standards slip, last season's double winners are the obvious favourites to prevail again. A potential problem might be post-major tournament syndrome. The Bavarians had no fewer than 13 players in South Africa and they could be subject to fatigue and injuries in the months ahead. As usual in these parts, automatic first-team places will be hard to come by and there are bound to be some big-name casualties.

Borussia Monchengladbach

Coach: Michael Frontzeck
Key Arrivals: Anderson (Fortuna Dusseldorf), De Camargo (Standard Liege), Idrissou (Freiburg)
Key Departures: Colautti (Maccabi Tel Aviv), Friend (Hertha Berlin), Neuville (Arminia Bielefeld)
Frontzeck will be keen to see a marked improvement in two areas in particular: the 60 goals they conceded last term (the third-worst in the Bundesliga) and their terrible away form. Gladbach hope the first problem will be rectified by the arrival of Brazilian central defender Anderson.

Borussia Dortmund

Coach: Jurgen Klopp
Key Arrivals: Kagawa (Cerezo Osaka), Langerak (Melbourne Victory), Lewandowski (Lech Poznan), Piszczek (Hertha Berlin)
Key Departures: Hottecke (Union Berlin), Koch (Duisburg), Tinga (Internacional), Ziegler (Stuttgart)
The Ruhr giants' fifth-place last season secured them a Europa League spot and there is no reason why they cannot stay in the top third of the table. Klopp is an outstanding young coach and has both a seemingly endless supply of fledgling talent (especially Nuri Sahin and Kevin Grosskreutz in midfield, centre-back Mats Hummels and left-back Marcel Schmelzer) and a potentially devastating strike force in the shape of Paraguay's Lucas Barrios and new Polish signing Robert Lewandowski.

Eintracht Frankfurt

Coach: Michael Skibbe
Key Arrivals: Bellaid (Boulogne), Gekas (Leverkusen), Rode (Kickers Offenbach), Tzavelas (Panionios)
Key Departures: Liberopoulos (AEK Athens), Proll (released), Spycher (Young Boys), Teber (Kayserispor)
Under the aegis of the uncharacteristically tetchy Skibbe, Eintracht were one of the most improved teams in the league last season. Well drilled and stylish in their attacking play, they were even good enough to claim Bayern's scalp. Incoming Greek marksman Theofanis Gekas should boost their strike rate no end.

Freiburg

Coach: Robin Dutt
Key Arrivals: Glockner (Koblenz), Nicu (Hertha Berlin), Rosenthal (Hannover)
Key Departures: Cha Du-ri (Celtic), Idrissou (Borussia Monchengladbach), Namouchi (released)
Some have the Black Forest club as relegation certainties following the departure of last season's top scorer Mohammadou Idrissou. But what the sceptics forget is that they have a great replacement in Senegalese striker Papiss Cisse, who was bought from French club Metz in January.

Hamburg

Coach: Armin Veh
Key Arrivals: Drobny (Hertha Berlin), Sowah (Portsmouth)
Key Departures: Boateng (Manchester City)
The new management team of former Stuttgart and Wolfsburg coach Veh and his technical director Bastian Reinhardt – who is a former long-serving centre-back at the northern club – must know deep down that they face a gargantuan task to realise their aim of bringing the Champions League to the Baltic port. Veh's top priority will be to find a cure for the squad's two most worrying conditions: their chronic inconsistency and the in-fighting in the dressing room.

Hannover

Coach: Mirko Slomka
Key Arrivals: Miller (Karlsruhe), Pogatetz (Middlesbrough), Stindl (Karlsruhe), Zieler (Manchester United)
Key Departures: Balitsch (Leverkusen), Bruggink (released), Durica (Lokomotiv Moscow), Krzynowek (released)
Undoubtedly traumatised by the suicide last year of keeper Robert Enke, Hannover did well to narrowly stay up. This season they will find it easier to concentrate on football, but a suspect defence – staffed by internationals Mario Eggimann (Switzerland), Karim Haggui (Tunisia) and Steve Cherundolo (USA) – may have the last word.

Hoffenheim

Coach: Ralf Rangnick
Key Arrivals: Mlapa (1860 Munich), Starke (Duisburg)
Key Departures: Hildebrand (released), Maicosuel (Botafogo), Nilsson (Nurnberg), Wellington (Fortuna Dusseldorf)
After topping the Bundesliga for a period in 2008-09, the *Dorfverein* (village club) from the south west have gone into steady decline and all the signs are that Rangnick, once thought of as Germany's answer to Arsene Wenger, is not the man to halt it, let alone lead an upward surge.

Kaiserslautern

Coach: Marco Kurz
Key Arrivals: Amri (Mainz), Hoffer (Napoli), Jessen (Midtjylland), Mitsanski (Zaglebie Lubin), Moravek (Schalke), Simunek (Wolfsburg)
Key Departures: Akcam (Gaziantepspor), Jendrisek (Schalke)
Despite losing their leading scorer, Slovakia's Erik Jendrisek, the second division champions ought not worry unduly about keeping their heads above water. Their recruitment drive this summer has brought in substantial quality, not least the Austria striker Erwin Hoffer.

Koln

Coach: Zvonimir Soldo
Key Arrivals: Buchtmann (Fulham), Giannoulis (Iraklis), Ionita (Rapid Bucharest), Jajalo (Siena), Lanig (Stuttgart)
Key Departures: Maniche (Sporting Lisbon), Tosic (CSKA Moscow), Wome (released)
The smart money is on Soldo, the former Croatia defender, being the first Bundesliga coach to bite the dust. Accused of an inability to motivate, excessive caution and not knowing how to get the best out of attacking star Lukas Podolski – whose return last year proved a total anti-climax – Soldo will be lucky to avoid the concrete shoes of the scapegoat.

Mainz

Coach: Thomas Tuchel
Key Arrivals: Babangida (unattached), Caligiuri (Greuther Furth), Holtby (Schalke),
Key Departures: Amri (Kaiserslautern), Fathi (Moscow Spartak), Hoogland (Schalke)
Despite a small stadium, limited budget and a largely unknown set of players, promoted Mainz produced a minor miracle to end up ninth last term. In his second season in charge, hot-tempered Tuchel will stay true to the same recipe of solid teamwork, a high-pressing game and swift transition from defence into attack.

Nurnberg

Coach: Dieter Hecking
Key Arrivals: Cohen (Maccabi Netanya), Nilsson (Hoffenheim), Okotie (Austria Wien)
Key Departures: Breno (Bayern Munich), Choupo-Moting (Hamburg), Gygax (Lucerne), Ottl (Bayern Munich), Risse (Leverkusen)
The Nurnberger, who only stayed up by beating Augsburg in a play-off, are most likely to be squeezed once more. Some of their most influential performers last term were loanees – and if just one signed on permanently, the outlook would be brighter.

Schalke

Coach: Felix Magath
Key Arrivals: Hoogland (Mainz), Jendrisek (Kaiserslautern), Metzelder (Real Madrid), Papadopoulos (Olympiakos), Raul (Real Madrid), Uchida (Kashima Antlers)
Key Departures: Asamoah (St Pauli), Bordon (Al Rayyan), Kuranyi (Dynamo Moscow), Moravek (Kaiserslautern), Zambrano (St Pauli)
On the face of it, the Royal Blues seem ill-prepared to repeat last term's second-place finish. Money for new signings is tight, and their best defender (Marcelo Bordon) and leading striker (Kevin Kuranyi) have ridden off into the sunset. However, hopes of a top-four finish are boosted by an excellent crop of young players and the exciting arrival of Raul from Real Madrid.

St Pauli

Coach: Holger Stanislawski
Key Arrivals: Asamoah (Schalke), Bartels (Rostock), Volz (Fulham), Zambrano (Schalke)
Key Departures: Beaulieu-Bourgault (Preussen Munster), Meggle (retired)
Back in the top flight for the first time since 2002, the cult club from Hamburg are bound to win friends up and down the country. However, survival points will be infinitely harder to collect. Newcomers such as former Fulham right-back Moritz

Volz and ex-Germany attacker Gerald Asamoah are arguably past their prime.

Stuttgart

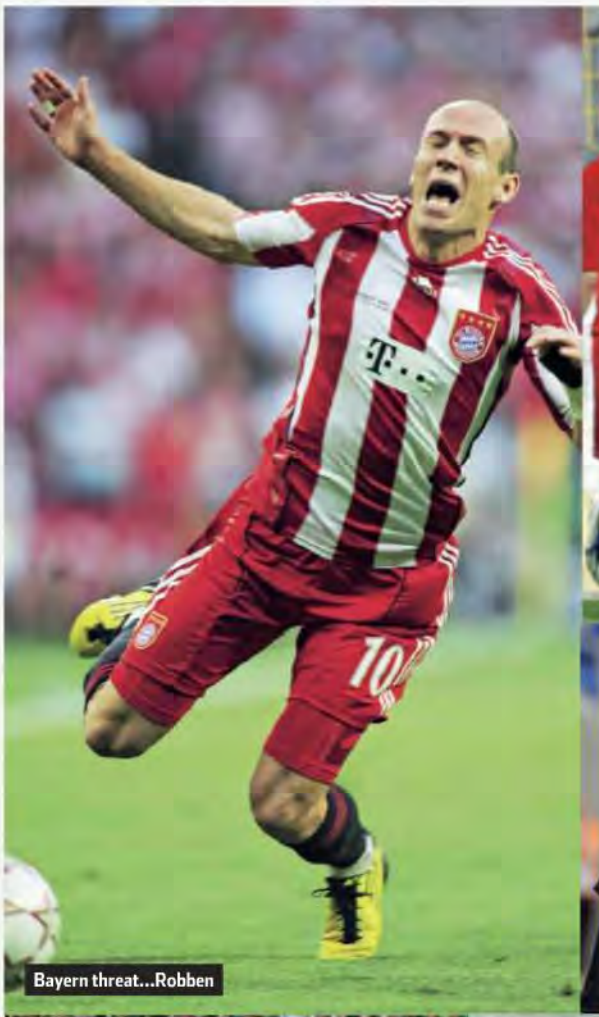
Coach: Christian Gross
Key Arrivals: Gentner (Wolfsburg), Harnik (Werder Bremen), Molinaro (Juventus), Niedermeier (Bayern Munich), Ziegler (Borussia Dortmund)
Key Departures: Hilbert (Besiktas), Hleb (Barcelona), Lanig (Koln), Mandjeck (Rennes), Osorio (Monterrey)
If their form in the second half of last season is anything to go by – no one in the Bundesliga amassed more points – the Stuttgarter should again qualify for Europe with ease. However, clouds are forming. The messy departure of head of recruitment/director of sport Horst Heldt to Schalke has destabilised the club, excellent young Germany midfielder Sami Khedira is being assailed with job offers and for all the unity of purpose and enthusiasm instilled by Gross, they appear short of attacking options in wide areas.

Werder Bremen

Coach: Thomas Schaaf
Key Arrivals: Arnautovic (Twente), Kroos (Hansa Rostock)
Key Departures: Carlos Alberto (Vasco da Gama), Harnik (Stuttgart)
As committed as ever to all-out attack – to the point where they are often caught with just two defenders against four or five counter-attackers – Bremen may be hara-kiri practitioners under Schaaf, but it has never stopped them setting up camp in the upper echelons. To keep the goals flowing they have spent £6million on Austria striker Marko Arnautovic, while all at the Weserstadion will be praying that playmaker Mesut Ozil is not enticed away.

Wolfsburg

Coach: Steve McClaren
Key Arrivals: Ben Khalifa (Grasshopper), Cicero (Tombense), Friedrich (Hertha Berlin), Kjaer (Palermo)
Key Departures: Gentner (Stuttgart), Martins (Rubin Kazan), Simunek (Kaiserslautern)
A lack of defensive solidity was the main reason the 2009 champions lost their bearings last term, so it was no surprise that the VW-backed club spent the close season shopping for top centre-backs, paying a cut-price £2million for Arne Friedrich and £12m for the promising young Dane, Simon Kjaer. Star striker Edin Dzeko seems increasingly likely to move on, but the good news is the capture of Swiss wunderkind Nassim Ben Khalifa. Fresh from guiding Twente to the Dutch title, former England manager McClaren is a far better coach than his UK critics claim and, provided his German lessons go well, he should achieve European qualification.


Bayern threat...Robben

Dortmund strike leader...Barrios

Under pressure...Hoffenheim coach Rangnick

Breached again...Hannover must stop leaks at the back

In the hot seat...Wolfsburg's new coach McClaren

Frustration...Koln's Podolski

Schalke new boy...Uchida

In at Stuttgart...Gentner

Celebration time...but can promoted St Pauli survive in the top flight?

Gathering storm

The new Serie A campaign kicks off against the backdrop of familiar problems, says Paddy Agnew

IT IS TO STATE but the obvious to suggest that the new Italian season opens against a background of gathering storm clouds.

After all, this has not been a good summer for Italy: an embarrassing World Cup flop in South Africa; failure (for the second time) to land the European Championship finals in 2016; the failure of Italy Under-19s to qualify for next year's Under-20 World Cup; rows between the Serie A clubs and the football federation; and the financial collapse of 21 lower-division clubs – not to mention the problems that have seen bank creditors put one of the country's biggest clubs, Roma, on the market. And these are just some of the things that have recently gone wrong with Italian football.

Worse still, almost nobody has lost sight of the fact that this year's outstanding "Italian" success story, namely Internazionale's Champions League triumph, is "Italian" only up to a certain point, given that not a single Italian played in the Final and that the club, of course, was coached by the Portuguese "Special One", Jose Mourinho. All in all, things are far from fine and dandy in *Il Bel Paese*.

That humiliating World Cup failure provided the backdrop to a controversial federation federal council meeting in mid-July which saw a walkout by Italy's new Lega A. Inspired by the example of Premier League clubs in England, Italy's Serie A clubs have formed the Lega A with a view not just to increasing revenue but, above all, to have a larger say in the management of Italian football.

> **"Serie A's 20 clubs had a turnover of 37 different coaches last season"**

Lega A president Maurizio Beretta puts it this way: "The revolution of the colonies in North America began in 1771 with the slogan of "no taxation without representation". Today, we create 97 per cent of the wealth of the football system and we devolve 10 per cent of that to other divisions. Yet we have only three out of 27 members of federal council."

For the Serie A clubs, the World Cup and Euro 2016 failures were bad enough, but their patience snapped when the federal council opted to reduce the number of non-EU players per squad from two to one. The Serie A clubs had asked for the number to be raised to three but, in the wake of the South Africa disaster, the federal council appears to have taken the view that it would be better to restrict rather than increase.

Given that many clubs had already bought such players, this decision was inevitably controversial.

Same again...Diego Milito (right) and Inter look all set to get the better of Philippe Mexes' Roma again this season

Self-employed millionaires

Lega A also wants the federation to enter into negotiations with the Italian government with a view to changing the status of professional footballers in the country, given that, to a certain extent, they are currently considered as comparable to PAYE factory employees rather than, as the Lega would like, self-employed millionaires.

On top of that, the Lega want to review various articles in the so-called "Melandri law", which has introduced the concept of "collective" TV rights, calling for a division of the funds among all the Serie A clubs.

All these arguments will run and run, as will the Roma story.

The club, which in the last few seasons has provided the only serious opposition to all-conquering Inter, has been in serious financial difficulty for

a number of years now, with the controlling Sensi family running up a debt of £330million, mainly with UniCredit Bank.

Having waited for times to get better and for Roma to resolve the situation, the banks finally lost patience this summer and moved in to reclaim their money. In the end, the Sensi family had to sell the family jewels to UniCredit, namely the Italpetroli holding company which controls AS Roma, in order to wipe out their debt. Currently, the club is being run by Newco Roma – 51 per cent club president Rosella Sensi, 49 per cent UniCredit – while the bank has given a mandate to the Rothschild Bank to find a new owner, just as soon as possible. The asking price, by the way, is likely to be around £125m.

In the meantime, in the wake of the World Cup failure, a number of important questions have been asked.

Is it not a sign of a frenetic climate that Italy's 20 Serie A clubs managed a turnover of 37 different coaches during last season? Would someone like Bayern Munich's Dutch coach Louis Van Gaal, who got off to a difficult start in Bavaria, have been given time in Italy to right the listing ship or would he not have been turfed out on his ear by Christmas? Is Van Gaal right when he says that success of a team full of relatively inexperienced players, such as Germany in South Africa, is proof that you can give youth its head without necessarily taking risks or jeopardising results?

Needless to say, many commentators argue that a player like Germany's Thomas Muller would never have been able to make the same meteoric rise from amateur to professional football in Italy's somewhat old-fashioned system.

One final thought: welcome back to Zdenek Zeman, the whistle-blower who, in 1998, pointed the finger at Juventus in relation to the debatable use of a variety of medicinal products. Since then, surprise, surprise, Zeman's star has waned, but the Czech coach's comeback started this summer with Foggia, a third-division club that he made a huge impact in Serie A in the early 1990s. ●

FIVE TO WATCH

Enhanced reputation...Quagliarella

Expectations...Bonucci

Impressive...Eduardo

Leadership...Jovetic

Returning...Adriano

● FABIO QUAGLIARELLA
(Napoli)
The striker is hardly a dark horse as his first season last year with Napoli was excellent but, more importantly, he goes into the new campaign as just about the only Italy player to have emerged from the South Africa fiasco with his reputation enhanced.

● LEONARDO BONUCCI
(Juventus)
Another to emerge from South Africa with his reputation unblemished – but only for the good reason that he did not play in any of Italy's three games. One of the finds of last season, he could do very well this year alongside Giorgio Chiellini, for both club and country.

● STEVAN JOVETIC
(Fiorentina)
Carefully nursed for two seasons by Cesare Prandelli at Fiorentina, the 20-year-old is now ready to assume a midfield leadership role, both mentally and physically. What's more, he has bags of talent.

● ADRIANO
(Roma)
If ever there was a player to watch, it is Adriano. But where to start watching: at the Roma training ground of Trigoria or at the many late-night discotheques of the Eternal City? Hugely talented, but with a lot to prove in this second coming in Italian football.

● EDUARDO
(Genoa)
So impressed for Portugal during the World Cup that Genoa offloaded first-choice keeper Marco Amelia to Milan and replaced him with the Sporting Braga stopper.

Bari
Coach: Giampiero Ventura
Key arrivals: Ghezzal (Siena), Raggi (Bologna), Rossi (Parma)
Key departures: Bonucci (Juventus), Meggiorini (Bologna), Ranocchia (Genoa)
Perhaps the best news for Bari is that Ventura stays as coach after leading his side to 10th place last year while playing some good football. However, the arrival of Algeria's Abdelkader Ghezzal will hardly compensate for the loss of talented defenders Andrea Ranocchia and Leonardo Bonucci. Ventura will do well to repeat last season's feat.

Bologna
Coach: Giuseppe Papadopulo
Key arrivals: Ekdal (Juventus), Khrin (Inter), Meggiorini (Bari), Morleo (Crotone)
Key departures: Appiah (released), Lanna (released), Raggi (Bari)
For the second year in succession, Bologna clung on to their Serie A spot last season by the skin of their teeth, again finishing 17th. They may struggle once more this term.

Brescia
Coach: Giuseppe Iachini
Key arrivals: Sereni (Torino)
Key departures: none
Brescia's best hopes lie with their promotion-winning coach Iachini and the enthusiasm generated by a return to the big time for the first time since 2005.

Cagliari
Coach: Pierpaolo Bisoli
Key arrivals: Ariaudo (Juventus), Biasi (Cesena), Pinardi (Modena)
Key departures: Marzoratti (Empoli)
Cagliari failed to reproduce the form of two seasons ago, struggling to finish 14th last year. New coach Bisoli will have his work cut out with a modest squad.

Catania
Coach: Marco Giampaolo
Key arrivals: Gomez (San Lorenzo), Martinho (Paulista)
Key departures: Martinez (Juventus), Sardo (Chievo)
As always, Serie A survival will be the name of the game for Catania, who finished 13th last season. New coach Giampaolo has lost talented Uruguayan attacking midfielder Jorge Martinez.

Cesena
Coach: Massimo Ficcadenti
Key arrivals: Moscatiello (Fulham), Nagatomo (Tokyo)
Key departures: none
The last time Cesena were in Serie A, in 1990-91, they were coached by a promising young fellow by the name of Marcello Lippi. Despite that, Cesena still went down and the same fate may await new coach Ficcadenti.

Chievo
Coach: Stefano Pioli
Key arrivals: Bogliacino (Napoli), Cesar (Grenoble), Minesso (Vicenza), Sardo (Catania), Trazzi (Lecce)
Key departures: Yepes (Milan)
Once more, the "Flying Donkies" ended up firmly buried at the wrong end of the table (16th) last season. May well again rely heavily on the experience of crafty striker Sergio Pellissier.

Fiorentina
Coach: Sinisa Mihajlovic
Key arrivals: Boruc (Celtic), D'Agostino (Udinese)
Key departures: Gobbi (released)
With Cesare Prandelli having moved on to take charge of the national side, Mihajlovic takes over a side which never really recovered from that controversial Champions League second-round elimination by Bayern Munich last March, slumping to finish a poor 11th. All will be expected to rally round inspirational Montenegrin midfielder Stevan Jovetic.

Genoa
Coach: Gian Piero Gasperini
Key arrivals: Chico (Almeria), Eduardo (Braga), Ranocchia (Bari), Rudolf (Debrecen), Toni (Roma), Zuculini (Hoffenheim)
Key departures: Amelia (Milan), Papastathopoulos (Milan)
Competitive throughout last season for a ninth-place finish, Genoa have been very active on the transfer market. With Gasperini still in charge, they will provide problems for everyone.

Internazionale
Coach: Rafa Benitez
Key arrivals: Castellazzi (Sampdoria), Coutinho (Vasco da Gama)
Key departures: Arnautovic (Werder Bremen), Quaresma (Besiktas), Toldo (retired)
The "Special One" might have gone but Inter, under ex-Liverpool maestro Benitez, still look by far the strongest squad in the land. Watch out for interesting Brazilian newcomer Coutinho.

Juventus
Coach: Luigi Delneri
Key arrivals: Bonucci (Bari), Lanzafame (Parma), Martinez (Catania), Motta (Roma), Pepe (Udinese), Storari (Sampdoria)
Key departures: Candreva (Udinese), Cannavaro (Al Ahli)
The Old Lady has stepped into the transfer fray, with a number of major signings. Arguably, however, something more is needed if Juve are to reclaim their position at the top of the Italian heap (last season, they finished seventh). Stand by for further big-name purchases given that 33 year-old Mauro Camoranesi and 32-year-old French striker David Trezeguet may have come to the end of the Juventus road.

Lazio
Coach: Edy Reja
Key arrivals: Bresciano (Palermo), Gonzalez (Nacional), Pintos (San Lorenzo)
Key departures: Baronio (released), Dabo (released), Julio Cruz (released), Kolarov (Manchester City), Siviglia (released)
The new signings have hardly convinced the Lazio faithful. With £15million in the bank following the sale of Aleksandar Kolarov, the supporters were hoping for something better. Lazio would certainly seem to need reinforcements if they are to improve on last season's disappointing 12th-place finish.

Lecce
Coach: Gigi Di Canio
Key arrivals: Olivera (Penarol)
Key departures: none
Back in Serie A for the second time in the last three seasons, Lecce look destined to struggle to avoid yet another drop with a squad that looks weak.

Milan
Coach: Massimo Allegri
Key arrivals: Amelia (Genoa), Papastathopoulos (Genoa), Yepes (Chievo)
Key departures: Dida (released), Favalli (released)
When Italian prime minister and club owner Silvio Berlusconi turned up for the first day of training for the new season, he was greeted by some very disgruntled fans who claimed that he had arrived with "his hands empty" (ie, no new players). That was not really true, but for Milan fans reared on Kaka, Pirlo and Nesta, the new names might seem like short rations.

Napoli
Coach: Walter Mazzari
Key arrivals: Blazi (Palermo), Cavani (Palermo)
Key departures: Bogliacino (Chievo), Hoffer (Kaiserslautern)
Napoli are nothing if not ambitious, as evidenced by the purchase of Uruguay's World Cup star Edinson Cavani. With Cavani's compatriot Walter Gargano, Slovak star Marek Hamsik, striker Fabio Quagliarella and Argentina's Ezequiel Lavezzi still in the squad, Napoli will be dangerous. Did well last season when they finished sixth.

Palermo
Coach: Delio Rossi
Key arrivals: Maccarone (Siena)
Key departures: Blazi (Napoli), Bresciano (Lazio), Cavani (Napoli), Kjaer (Wolfsburg), Simplicio (Roma)
With all due respect, Massimo Maccarone's arrival in place of the departing Edinson Cavani hardly augurs well for the Palermo season. Along with the other departures, coach Rossi will have his work cut out to match last season's impressive fifth-place.

Parma
Coach: Pasquale Marino
Key arrivals: Marques (Espanyol), Paletta (Boca Juniors)
Key departures: Lanzafame (Juventus), Luis Jimenez (Ternana)
Having returned to Serie A last summer after a year in Serie B, Parma had an excellent season last time out, finishing eighth. New signing Fernando Marques could form an interesting front line alongside Valeri Bojinov and Alberto Paloschi. Could be another good campaign.

Roma
Coach: Claudio Ranieri
Key arrivals: Adriano (Sao Paulo), Simplicio (Palermo)
Key departures: Motta (Juventus), Tonetto (released), Toni (Genoa)
One year on and there is a familiar air of uncertainty. The creditor bank, Unicredit, have put the club on the market for £125million. Can Ranieri, helped by the ageing Francesco Totti and boosted by the return to Italian football of Brazilian "enfant terrible", Adriano, do it again? We have our doubts.

Sampdoria
Coach: Domenico Di Carlo
Key arrivals: Curci (Siena)
Key departures: Castellazzi (Inter), Storari (Juventus)
Sampdoria's fourth place finish last year means that the Genoa club return to Europe's big stage. In truth, however, the Champions League is almost certain to represent a bridge too far for Sampdoria's limited squad strength.

Udinese
Coach: Francesco Guidolin
Key arrivals: Candreva (Juventus)
Key departures: D'Agostino (Fiorentina), Lukovic (Zenit), Pepe (Juventus)
Remarkably, Udinese provided the leading goalscorer of last season, Antonio Di Natale, with 29 goals, despite finishing 15th in the table. Useful players such as Gaetano D'Agostino and Simone Pepe have moved on, but Udinese have a knack of maintaining their squad strength. A better season could be in store.

Milan's new man...Clarence Seedorf looks up to coach Allegri

Bologna buy...Archimede Morleo

Credit crunch...Ranieri

Repeat performance...Ventura

High hopes...Lavezzi (left) and Hamsik

Young talent...Coutinho

Parma star...Marques

On the move...Motta

Making his mark...Maccarone

Up for *El Clasico*...Carles Puyol halted Cristiano Ronaldo when Barcelona and Real Madrid locked horns last season

Indecent haste

Never mind Spain's World Cup triumph, the Real Madrid-Barcelona show is back in town. Sid Lowe reports

"Even the World Cup reinforced the dominance of the Big Two, whose budgets, bolstered by individual television rights, are four times the size of any other club in the top flight"

TIME WAITS for no man, not even the king of the world. You cannot dwell on success, even when you should – and the Spanish most certainly should. There is always next year...and next year comes so very, very fast.

For the losers, that is one of the great things about the game – the chance for redemption is delivered rapidly – but for the winners it can be a great pity.

Time to talk about Real Madrid and Barcelona? What, already? Can't we talk about Spain a little longer?

The thing is, even talking about Spain inevitably means talking about Madrid and Barcelona. The Spanish had waited their whole lives for this. As the front cover of the country's best-selling newspaper put it: "It doesn't matter if you're 10, 50 or 100, you have never lived anything like the moment you are living now."

From the game's great underachievers, Spain have officially become football's great overachievers, one of only three nations to be world and European champions at the same time.

Millions gathered in Madrid to celebrate victory in South Africa; it was the greatest party the country had ever seen and it promised to go on forever. But club football is now the focus once more. Awkward and uncomfortable though it is – and plain wrong though it feels – Real Madrid and Barcelona are back, juggernauts that cannot be stopped.

In truth, they had never really gone away. During the World Cup, the Catalan press in particular were quick to point out that Spain's success was Barcelona's success – the style of the national team was Barcelona's style, its players too. They were right, of course, but this was no mere curiosity, it was a cause. One headline during the tournament declared that, leading the scoring charts, David Villa was "feeling the Barca effect". As if the striker had never scored goals before...

As for Leo Messi, he was defended, while Madrid were attacked – Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder's presence in the Final a reminder of their folly. The Barcelona-supporting, Madrid-baiting Catalan media were quick to remind readers that Florentino Perez, the president who sold Robben and Sneijder to sign Kaka and Karim Benzema, had begun his second reign as president in the same way as he ended the first: without a trophy. Which is precisely why Jose Mourinho has arrived in Madrid.

Meanwhile in the Madrid sports media, you would think that the country across the western border was officially called Cristiano Ronaldo.

In the wake of his knockout at Spain's hands, the obsession with him was only temporarily put on hold: the news that Ronaldo, "always at the cutting edge of fashion", had painted his toenails black made the front page of *Marca*. And where former Real boss Manuel Pellegrini had been pilloried, Mourinho was eulogised. Even as six Barcelona youth-team products prepared to represent Spain in the World Cup Final, Mourinho was apparently preparing to use the stars of the "greatest youth-team set-up on earth".

Into the spotlight

Spain had waited its entire footballing life for this moment, and while the memory will never diminish, while nothing will ever quite compare, the clubs are already bullying their way into the spotlight, led by the behemoths. News is relentless, always looking to move on, always looking ahead; to the last weekend of August, when La Liga kicks off again, to the signings that will proceed it.

For most Spaniards, the speed with which club football has returned to the top of the agenda has been rather rude; a lack of respect towards the best football team there has ever been, everyone's football team. You almost want the Spanish league season to be postponed a little so everyone could enjoy this moment that little longer. But it is impossible, and it feels like the partisan press didn't want it anyway.

And so it is that everyone moves on reluctantly. To the historic departure from Real Madrid of Guti and Raul –

the latter arguably the greatest player in Spain's history, albeit one who does not boast the medals that David Villa and Fernando Torres now can. To Jose Mourinho and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, to Messi and Kaka. To Madrid and Barcelona; Barcelona and Madrid.

And to no one else. Even the World Cup reinforced the dominance of the Big Two, clubs whose budgets, bolstered by individual television rights, are four times the size of any other club in the top flight; clubs who monopolise the country's talent. The side that started the Final included just one player not belonging to either Madrid or Barcelona and he was widely, if a little unfairly, dismissed as the team's weak link – Villarreal's Joan Capdevila.

Last season Barcelona lost only once and twice defeated Madrid. They finished three points ahead of their rivals and 28 ahead of third-placed Valencia.

The figure may well be as big again. Valencia, after all, have lost their best two players over the summer, with David Villa and David Silva departing. Villa has gone to Barcelona, and so has fourth-placed Sevilla's Adriano. Neither side look as strong as last year, while Madrid and Barcelona should be stronger.

Meanwhile, fifth-placed Mallorca are in administration; Villarreal in sixth are preparing to sell; seventh-placed Getafe have lost their best two players; and Athletic Bilbao in eighth are limited by their Basque-only policy. Only Atletico Madrid can be expected to buck the weakening trend in the face of perpetually strengthening rivals.

Normally, Perez's policy at Real Madrid would be simply to buy the outstanding star of the World Cup. This time that is impossible – and not just because Mourinho will not allow it. Diego Forlan is at Atletico, he can't very well buy Robben or Sneijder, and the rest are at Barcelona. But that will not stop him buying – and buying big. In much the same way as they always have, in much the same way as Barcelona have, splashing £34million on Villa. And in much the same way as no one else can.

No wonder no one expects any team to catch Madrid or Barcelona. Or, in fact, to even beat them. This season or any season. For everyone else, footballing joy came from *la seleccion*; now the big two are muscling their way back in. And with indecent haste. ●

FIVE TO WATCH

Goals galore...Villa

Surpise packet...Leon

Completing the jigsaw...Merida

Point to prove...Soldado

Questions...Di Maria

● DAVID VILLA
(Barcelona)
Xavi told David Villa he would get "loads of goals" for Barcelona and it is hard to disagree. On course to become Spain's all-time top scorer, he has averaged over 20 goals a season for the last five years. Surely only injury will prevent him from continuing that run.

● PEDRO LEON
(Real Madrid)
For all the headlines and the superstar targets, Madrid's most interesting and surprising signing might just be Pedro Leon from Getafe. Technically impeccable, the winger does not appear to fit Jose Mourinho's system, but if he is given a chance he could be wonderful to watch.

● FRAN MERIDA
(Atletico Madrid)
The man that Arsene Wenger once said would replace Cesc Fabregas at Arsenal actually departed the Emirates first. Atletico have long lacked a central midfielder to get them playing and Merida, a lifelong fan, could be the key.

● ROBERTO SOLDADO
(Valencia)
For all his goals there has often been a nagging doubt about his ability. Now at Valencia, this is a wonderful opportunity to prove the doubters wrong. However, it will not be easy replacing David Villa.

● ANGEL DI MARIA
(Real Madrid)
Asked about Di Maria soon after signing for Madrid, Mourinho admitted that, much as he was good in Portugal, he did not know if the Argentinian would be able to perform in a league as difficult as Spain's. He insisted Madrid should only sign him if the price was good. They signed him for £22million. Money well spent?

Almeria
Coach: Juanma Lillo
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Chico (Genoa), Cisma (Racing Santander), Soriano (Osasuna)
Lillo's return saw a marked improvement in form last season and allowed Almeria to survive relatively comfortably. The departures may be significant but Lillo has changed the club's mentality and style, and they might even sneak into the top half.

Athletic Bilbao
Coach: Joaquin Caparros
Key arrivals: San Jose (Liverpool)
Key departures: Etxeberria (retired), Yeste (Al Wasl)
As usual, Athletic have fished in Basque waters, signing from lower-level clubs in the region. But the most significant piece of business of the summer is the lack of business: striker Fernando Llorente, so impressive against Portugal at the World Cup, insists he is staying.

Atletico Madrid
Coach: Quique Sanchez Flores
Key arrivals: Filipe (Deportivo), Merida (Arsenal), Suarez (Mallorca)
Key departures: Pablo (West Brom), Roberto (Benfica)
Nothing but good news at the Calderon. The club have finally ended their debilitating, 14-year wait for a trophy, Forlan, Aguero, Simao and Reyes are all still Atletico players, and the board have backed the coach. A return to the Champions League is the eminently attainable aim.

Barcelona
Coach: Pep Guardiola
Key arrivals: Adriano (Sevilla), Villa (Valencia)
Key departures: Chygrynskiy (Shakhtar Donetsk), Henry (New York), Toure (Manchester City)
No sign of Cesc Fabregas – the man that outgoing president Joan Laporta was desperate to sign and confident of catching. Barca may have to wait until next year for the Arsenal skipper but they have got David Villa. Goals are guaranteed, but there are question marks over the role of Ibrahimovic, and the fitness and form of Xavi and Iniesta, plus the hunger of players who have literally won it all.

Deportivo La Coruna
Coach: Miguel Angel Lotina
Key arrivals: Urretavizcaya (Benfica)
Key departures: Filipe Luis (Atletico), Mista (Toronto)
Not a penny spent so far, and their best player, Filipe Luis, has departed. Unlikely to be an enjoyable season on the north-west coast.

Espanyol
Coach: Mauricio Pochettino
Key arrivals: Osvaldo (Bologna)
Key departures: Raul Tamudo (released)
Combative, well-organised and with a home of their own at last, Espanyol should grab a top-half finish but not much more.

Getafe
Coach: Michel
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: Pedro Leon (Real Madrid), Soldado (Valencia)
One of the most attractive teams last season have lost their two best players, but expect the arrival of young, ambitious talents before the beginning of the season and another impressive campaign on a limited budget.

Hercules
Coach: Esteban Vigo
Key arrivals: Aguilar (Udinese), Fritzler (Lanus)
Key departures: none
Back in the top flight at last, the question is: for how long? The likely answer, with a tiny budget, is not very long at all.

Levante
Coach: Luis Garcia
Key arrivals: Sergio (Deportivo)
Key departures: none
The last time they were in the top division, Levante's unpaid players threatened a strike and they were relegated. Won promotion under new owners but money is still desperately tight.

Malaga
Coach: Jesualdo Ferreira
Key arrivals: none
Key departures: none
Last season's final day survival was a little too close for comfort. Under new Qatari owners and desperate to avoid that suffering this term, they have turned to former Porto coach Ferreira.

Mallorca
Coach: Michael Laudrup
Key arrivals: De Guzman (Feyenoord)
Key departures: Aduriz (Valencia), Borja Valero (Villarreal)
Mallorca lost a Champions League place in the 93rd minute of the final day and then a Europa League place after falling foul of UEFA's financial rules, having gone into administration. Should struggle after the departure of their best players – but people say that every year.

Osasuna
Coach: Jose Antonio Camacho
Key arrivals: Damia (Betis), Lekic (Red Star Belgrade)
Key departures: Azpilicueta (Marseille)
Camacho has proved himself the perfect coach for a proud and passionate club – and while survival will be the aim, they will expect to secure it ahead of time.

Racing Santander
Coach: Miguel Angel Portugal
Key arrivals: Bakircioglu (Ajax)
Key departures: Canales (Real Madrid)
Limited financially, they will again be looking for loan deals to bolster the squad.

Real Madrid
Coach: Jose Mourinho
Key arrivals: Canales (Racing Santander), Di Maria (Benfica), Pedro Leon (Getafe)
Key departures: Guti (Besiktas), Metzelder (Schalke), Raul (Schalke)
Madrid's greatest-ever season in terms of league points was not enough to keep Manuel Pellegrini in a job, which rather says it all. Mourinho is under pressure at home and, especially, in Europe. His arrival appears to signal the end of the galactico policy. Will it signal the end of failure under Florentino Perez?

Real Sociedad
Coach: Martin Lasarte
Key arrivals: Joseba Llorente (Villarreal)
Key departures: none
Back in the top flight with an almost entirely home-grown team. Will continue with much the same policy this year, but have made one big summer signing in Llorente.

Sevilla
Coach: Antonio Alvarez
Key arrivals: Dabo (Saint-Etienne), Guarente (Atalanta)
Key departures: Adriano (Barcelona)
The sale of Adriano came as a surprise and may mean they avoid the need to offload Luis Fabiano or Jesus Navas. But Fredi Kanoute is getting older and Sevilla need Alvaro Negredo to improve on his first season at the club.

Sporting Gijon
Coach: Manolo Preciado
Key arrivals: Botia (Barcelona), Eguren (Villarreal), Novo (Rangers)
Key departures: none
Novo's surprise signing could yet prove a masterstroke for a team that lacked goals last season but improved steadily.

Valencia
Coach: Unai Emery
Key arrivals: Aduriz (Mallorca), Soldado (Getafe), Topal (Galatasaray)
Key departures: Silva (Manchester City), Villa (Barcelona)
And so, at last, Juan Soler's disastrous presidency catches up with Valencia. David Villa and David Silva have been sold but their stadium still has not. Coach Emery insists, however, that he has a good feeling about the campaign.

Villarreal
Coach: Juan Carlos Garrido
Key arrivals: Borja Valero (Mallorca)
Key departures: Escudero (Boca Juniors), Ibagaza (Olympiakos), J Llorente (Real Sociedad), Pires (released)
A new era for Villarreal, whose miracle was based on hard cash as well as intelligent club building. President Roig admits there will have to be more sales.

Zaragoza
Coach: Jose Aurelio Gay
Key arrivals: Contini (Napoli)
Key departures: Carrizo (River Plate), Suazo (Monterrey)
Survival last season hinged on seven loan stars, most of whom have now left, though Contini has agreed a permanent deal.

Big in Bilbao...main goalscorer Llorente wants to stay

Great expectations...Mourinho takes his first training session with Real Madrid

Great to be here...Barca new boy Adriano

Stars in stripes...Atletico's Forlan and Aguero

Food for thought...new Mallorca boss Michael Laudrup (right) and backroom staff member Miguel Angel Nadal

Passion...Osasuna's Carlos Aranda (in red)

Change...Ferreira (left) meets the new owners

Settled in Seville...Tiberio Guarente

To celebrate *World Soccer*'s 50th anniversary, we select the

Fifty teams that

Vintage...the Real Madrid team that beat Eintracht Frankfurt

REAL MADRID, early 1960s

By the time *World Soccer* was launched in 1960, Real Madrid had already won the first five European Cup Finals. In 1966 they won the competition for a sixth time, but it was the team of 1960 – which beat Eintracht Frankfurt 7-3 in the Final – and that of the preceding five years which must rank as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, club sides ever.

In September 1961 issue of *World Soccer*, Eric Batty wrote: "Real Madrid are a streamlined powerful combination, well drilled and tightly disciplined, led by the greatest all-round player of his time, Alfredo Di Stefano, aided and abetted by Ferenc Puskas who runs him close in every respect and surpasses him in the matter of goal scoring."

Glory, glory...Spurs double winners

"Real Madrid were led by the greatest of all time, Alfredo Di Stefano"

PENAROL, early 1960s

Twice winners of the Libertadores Cup, in 1961 and 1962, they would have made it three in a row but lost in a play-off to Santos after originally drawing the Final on aggregate. Also defeated Benfica in 1961 to win the World Club Cup and were crowned champions of Uruguay in 1960, 1961 and 1962.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR, 1961

Led by skipper Danny Blanchflower and manager Bill Nicholson, Spurs became the first English team of the 20th century to win the coveted league and FA Cup double. They won their first 11 games of the season and went on to amass a total of 115 goals in 42 league matches.

Jack Rollin reported Tottenham's success in the June 1961 edition of *World Soccer*: "Despite proving themselves to be worthy league champions, the Final of the FA Cup saw them far below form. In fact the virtual 10-man Leicester City team, with [injured] right-back Len Chalmers a passenger for three-quarters of the match, made Spurs struggle most of the game. However, Spurs' achievement over the whole season earned them the justified title of 'finest team in England'."

BENFICA, early 1960s

A team put together by Hungarian coach Bela Guttmann in 1959 and containing the great Eusebio dominated Portuguese football throughout the 1960s. Guttmann's era lasted until 1962 and it saw his side become the first club to break the European Cup domination of Real Madrid, with victory over Barcelona in the 1961 Final. A year later Guttmann's side repeated the feat against Real Madrid.

SANTOS, early 1960s

Inspired by Pele and Claudio Coutinho, Santos won five Brazilian titles in a row, as well as the Libertadores Cup and World Club Cup in 1962 and 1963.

In December 1962 edition of *World Soccer*, Gordon Jeffery reported on the first leg of their World Club Cup tie with Benfica: "Pele and Coutinho, as if telepathically, moved together into one of their short but untouchable spells of soccer sorcery, and in the space of three minutes, each scored to put Santos 3-1 in the lead."

INTERNAZIONALE, mid 1960s

Helenio Herrera's team won the Serie A title three times in four years, but it was their exploits in the European Cup that stood out, beating past champions Real Madrid in 1964 and Benfica the following year.

In October 1965 edition of *World Soccer*, Eric Batty wrote: "For Real Madrid at their best, the drive and personality of the team was established on the field where Di Stefano coaxed his colleagues to greatness. With Inter the dominating influence rests on the touchline in the personage of Herrera, who has inspired his men to world superiority – handling them with kid gloves which hide iron fists."

Brazil's best...Pele

outstanding teams of the past half-century Words: Duncan Bond

changed the game

PORTUGAL, 1966

Under the guidance of Sporting Lisbon coach Otto Gloria, and with Eusebio at the fulcrum of every attacking move, Portugal reached the semi-finals of the 1966 World Cup, where they eventually lost to the hosts, England.

In the October 1966 edition of *World Soccer*, Campbell Kendall wrote: "Having watched them closely for over a fortnight, this man [Gloria] has the gift of blending any number of stars, getting them to play for each other, not for themselves, with the best possible results following."

Boys of '66...Portugal

ENGLAND, 1966

Alf Ramsey's team of "wingless wonders" beat all before them in 1966 to win the World Cup on home soil.

Leslie Page wrote in the September 1966 edition of *World Soccer*: "Gordon Banks was vastly favoured by visiting critics for his calm and unhurried work. In George Cohen and Ray Wilson we saw the modern, attacking full-back, part of the back four, and yet still scooting up the wing to push across centres. Nobby Stiles, Jack Charlton and Bobby Moore played until they were ready to drop.

"One supposes that Alan Ball eventually stopped running when he disappeared down the tunnel, but it could not be taken as a certainty. Geoff Hurst and Martin Peters made a late mark, Hurst especially as the first man to notch a hat-trick in the World Cup Final. If the idol of the crowds was not Bobby Moore then it was Bobby Charlton. He looked like the only England player who could ever win a match on his own."

CELTIC, 1967

With a team of 11 Glaswegians, Celtic became the first British club to win the European Cup when they defeated Internazionale in Lisbon.

John Stone wrote in the July 1967 edition of *World Soccer*: "With their 'annihilation' of Inter, a word dear to the Parkhead fans' hearts, and most popular in their vocabulary, they proved themselves indisputably as a great side. Now, not only Scottish sides will be out to topple the Stein supremos. Every club in Europe, nay, the world, will be after their scalps."

MANCHESTER UNITED, 1968

Matt Busby led Manchester United to their first European Cup triumph 10 years after many of his "Busby Babes" were killed on a tarmac runway in Munich. A team, without regular captain Denis Law but still containing the names of Bobby Charlton, George Best, Pat Crerand and Nobby Stiles, defeated Benfica 4-1 at Wembley to become the first English club to win the famous silver trophy.

Battle...Estudiantes celebrate beating Manchester United

Stiles...European Cup winner

ESTUDIANTES, late 1960s

Winning the league in 1967 gave Estudiantes their first Argentinian championship and secured a first title win for any club other than one of Buenos Aires' big five of Boca Juniors, River Plate, Racing, Independiente and San Lorenzo.

The club from La Plata, coached by Osvaldo Zubeldia, then went on to win the Libertadores Cup three years running, from 1968 to 1970, and also played in three World Club Cup Finals, defeating Manchester United in an ill-tempered affair in 1968 and then losing to Milan and Feyenoord in successive seasons.

BRAZIL, 1970

Mario Zagallo's Brazil of 1970 are still considered to be one of the greatest sides of all time. A team that included Pele, Jairzinho, Rivelino, Gerson, Tostao and captain Carlos Alberto dazzled everyone at the Mexico 1970 World Cup as Brazil became the first nation to win the Jules Rimet trophy three times with a scintillating display to beat Italy 4-1 in the Final. Carlos Alberto's goal that began deep inside the Brazilian's half of the pitch, epitomised this wonderful team.

● **AJAX, early 1970s**

A team built initially by Rinus Michels and then taken over by Stefan Kovacs (once Michels had joined Barcelona), Ajax won three European Cups in succession. In true Michels fashion they played total football, and with the likes of Johan Cruyff, Ruud Krol and a wonderful midfield axis of Gerrie Muhren and Arie Haan, they won Europe's top prize in 1971. That initial success was continued under the tutelage of Romanian chain-smoker Kovacs, who guided them to their 1972 and 1973 triumphs.

In July 1972 issue of *World Soccer*, John Sparrow wrote: "There was an attacking consistency about Ajax with some inspired football. On November 7, Feyenoord went down 2-1 in Amsterdam and, in retrospect, a turning point in the season was reached. Ajax were en route to the greatest year in their history."

Dutch magic...Ajax won the European Cup from 1971 to 1973

● **LEEDS UNITED, early 1970s**

A team first assembled by Don Revie in the mid-1960s reached their peak at the turn of the decade when they were widely regarded as one of English football's greatest teams. Twice they won the UEFA Cup, in 1968 and 1971, and they were league champions in 1969 and 1974, after which Revie left to take the job of England manager. However, arguably Leeds' greatest display came in the Final of the 1975 European Cup when, under temporary manager Jimmy Armfield, they lost to Bayern Munich despite having outplayed the German champions for most of the match.

Awesome...Schoen's Germany

● **WEST GERMANY, 1972**

Helmut Schoen's team that won the 1972 European Championship was arguably better than the one that conquered the world two years later. It was the year that Franz Beckenbauer was at his peak and his sublime talent, along with, in Brian Glanville's words, the "effulgent presence" of Gunter Netzer, was a joy to watch.

In August 1972 edition of *World Soccer*, Brian Glanville wrote: "Beckenbauer's performance in Belgium was quite glorious. He has become the 'Ego Ideal' of this West German generation, he whom they wish to emulate."

● **BAYERN MUNICH, 1974**

Three-times winners of the European Cup, Bayern hit their best form when they defeated Atletico Madrid in the 1974 Final replay, to win the trophy for the first time. The Bayern team contained players of the calibre of Sepp Maier, Paul Breitner, Georg Schwarzenbeck, Gerd Muller, Uli Hoeness and, of course, captain Franz Beckenbauer, all of whom would be involved in the World Cup-winning team a month later. Bayern retained the European Cup in both 1975 and 1976 before the somewhat ageing team then began to break up.

> **Ajax won three European Cups in true Michels fashion, playing total football**

● **POLAND, 1974**

After eliminating England at Wembley in 1973, an exciting Polish team containing the likes of Jerzy Gorgon, Grzegorz Lato, Jan Domarski, Kazimierz Deyna and, of course, the goalkeeping "clown" Jan Tomaszewski went to the World Cup in West Germany and continued to impress, finishing in third place.

Polish surprise...Lato

In August 1974 edition of *World Soccer*, Arthur Rotmil wrote: "Poland, who surprised many people with the quality of their football, have proved conclusively that they eliminated England from the preliminary stages of the World Cup purely on merit. Indeed, Poland appeared good enough to even win the World Cup. Only bad luck and some stupendous saves by Germany goalkeeper Maier prevented the Poles from reaching the Final."

● **HOLLAND, 1974**

It has been said many a time that Rinus Michels' disciples of total football were the greatest team never to win the World Cup, or for that matter the European Championship.

The team of 1974 arguably came closest when the likes of Cruyff, Neeskens, Krol, Rensenbrink, Van Hanegem and Rep were stopped in the Final by Franz Beckenbauer's West Germany despite taking a first minute lead. They peaked in the semi-final where a wonderful display, not least by Cruyff, swept aside the holders Brazil 2-0. In 1978, without Cruyff and Michels, they again reached the Final but Argentina were too strong, and Holland, in fairness, not as good four years previous.

● **INDEPENDIENTE, 1975**

The Buenos Aires club made the history books when they became the first and only team to win the Libertadores Cup four years running, from 1972 to 1975.

Reflecting on their fourth win against Chile's Union Espanola in the March 1984 issue of *World Soccer*, Eric Weil wrote: "The Independiente team had become known as 'the family' for several reasons – their lack of internal problems in comparison to other teams, teamwork and the way they helped each other out on the field and their few team changes."

● **CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1976**

The image of Antonin Panenka chipping Sepp Maier from the penalty spot is a memory that never fades when recalling the Czech side who surprised everyone to win the 1976 European Championship in Belgrade. The Czechs, to their credit, were unbeaten in 20 games preceding the final, which included an inspiring 3-1 semi-final win against Johan Cruyff's Holland. The likes of Marian Masny, Zdenek Nehoda and captain Anton Ondrus led West Germany 2-0 in the Final after just 25 minutes, and it

Liverpool legends...Jimmy Case (left) and Ray Kennedy

wasn't until one minute from the end that the holders equalised to force the game to extra time and eventually penalties.

● LIVERPOOL, 1977

Twelve years after their first venture into Europe ended bitterly in defeat at the San Siro, Liverpool, already English league champions, and very nearly FA Cup winners, returned to Italy to win the European Cup for the first time in their history.

In June 1977 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "I can't remember seeing a team enjoy winning as much as Liverpool's heroes as they galloped a double lap of honour round Rome's Olympic stadium. It said so much – about defeats in the past as well as about the grand triumph on the night."

● BOCA JUNIORS, 1977-78

After defeating then holders Cruzeiro on a penalty shoot-out in 1977, Boca Juniors retained the Libertadores Cup in 1978 with a 4-0 aggregate win over Deportivo Cali of Colombia to make it the 12th time that an Argentinian club had won the trophy in its 19-year history. The following year they again reached the Final but were beaten by Olimpia of Paraguay.

● ARGENTINA, 1978

On home soil Argentina thrilled their supporters with a disciplined yet tantalising display under the leadership of the chain-smoking Cesar Luis Menotti to secure the nation's first-ever World Cup.

Eric Weil wrote in the August 1978 issue of *World Soccer*: "Tactics apart, the most important reason for Argentina's World Cup victory was that they played soccer all the way without resorting to rough play, even when provoked by the opposition which happened a number of times.

"Not so long ago any Argentine team would have been quick to retaliate to any aggressive soccer and would have lost 50 per cent of their effectiveness. This was discipline, Menotti's calm discipline which was never easy to impose on the characteristically hot headed Latins.... and this is why a coach can rarely have done more to win a World Cup."

● NOTTINGHAM FOREST, 1979-80

An amazing couple of years in English football saw Nottingham Forest rise from the depths of Division Two to become league champions and, most notably, European Champions, twice. Inspired by the dynamic managerial partnership of Brian Clough and Peter Taylor, Forest beat Malmo 1-0 in the 1979 Final and followed it up a year later with another single-goal victory against Hamburg in Madrid.

Following their first European success, Keir Radnedge wrote in the June 1979 edition of *World Soccer*: "Just over two years ago Forest were scrapping their way out of the Second Division. A year later they had become surprise champions of England and now they are champions of Europe. No team in the 23-year history of European club football, has made that sort of triumphant progression."

"Nottingham Forest rose from the depths of Div Two to win the European Cup"

Fla star...Zico (right) takes on Liverpool

● FLAMENGO, 1981

Having won the Libertadores Cup in 1981, a Zico-inspired Flamengo outplayed European champions Liverpool to win the World Club Cup for the first time.

In January 1982 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "Their one-touch control was always a weapon which gave them that much more time to think out their moves, enjoy their skills. Up front they had electricity. Nunes ran into all the right gaps, Tita tricked and checked and dummied and Zico was always a lurking danger. When the chance arose he was in possession, at the right place, at the right time, to weight his shots and passes to perfection."

● BRAZIL, 1982

Tele Santana's team of Socrates, Falcao, Junior, Eder and Zico (to name but five) played some dazzling, delightful football at the 1982 World Cup in Spain. It can be argued that they would have rivalled the Holland team of eight years earlier as the best side never to win the trophy. Having outplayed the USSR and comfortably thrashed both New Zealand and Scotland, they were undone by a Paolo Rossi-inspired Italy team in the second group stage and returned home empty-handed.

● ITALY, 1982

Italy won their third World Cup thanks to the experience of captain Dino Zoff, the wise old head of coach Enzo Bearzot and the goals, in the latter stages at least, of Paolo Rossi. Having begun slowly and progressed from their group with just three draws, Italy suddenly moved through the gears all the way to the Final in Madrid, where they beat West Germany 3-1.

Super *Azzurri*...Italy lift the World Cup

In August 1982 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "To win the World Cup is football's greatest achievement. To achieve that triumph with your midfield general [Giancarlo Antognoni] in the stands and your centre-forward [Francesco Graziani] taken out in the ninth minute is to succeed on the grand scale."

● FRANCE, 1982-84

A team that contained the midfield alliance of Alain Giresse, Jean Tigana, Bernard Genghini and the mesmerising Michel Platini were unfortunately beaten by West Germany in a thrilling 1982 World Cup semi-final. Two years later, playing at their Paris home and with Luis Fernandez replacing Genghini, they won the European Championship. In July 1984 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "France have now re-established a sense of football justice. Teams can win at the highest level while concentrating on the virtues of skill, technique and vivacity; teams can win at the highest level with superior class."

● LIVERPOOL, 1984

Not a vintage Liverpool side, but one that merits a place as their fourth European Cup win was achieved against a fine Roma side in their own backyard. The team of Grobbelaar, Neal, Hansen, Lawrenson, Souness, Whelan, Rush and Dalglish also won the league and League Cup that year under the astute eye of manager Joe Fagan in his first season at the helm.

● JUVENTUS, 1985

On one of the darkest nights in football history, Juventus won the European Cup for the first time in the graveyard of Heysel. A Michel Platini penalty against a Liverpool side who were very non-committed, for obvious reasons, decided the match. However whether Juve deserved the title or not, they had a team under coach Giovanni Trapattoni that contained players who were worthy continental champions. Platini, *World Soccer*'s Player of the Year and Ballon d'Or winner, was ably assisted by the likes of Antonio Cabrini and Gaetano Scirea in defence, Marco Tardelli and Zbigniew Boniek in midfield and the diminutive figure of Paolo Rossi up front.

● DENMARK, 1986

Denmark thrilled the Mexican crowds at the 1986 World Cup by convincingly winning their group with three victories from three games. The team of Preben Elkjaer, Morten Olsen, Jesper Olsen, Soren Lerby and Frank Arnesen played some exciting, passing football with Michael Laudrup, the inspiration for so many Danish moves. In their second group game, a hat-trick by Elkjaer helped destroy Uruguay 6-1 and they also comfortably beat West Germany and Scotland. The second round was one step too far as they crumbled to a Spain team in which striker Emilio Butragueno scored four times in a 5-1 win, but Denmark were a breath of fresh air.

One-man team...Maradona

● ARGENTINA, 1986

Not quite a one-man team, but very nearly. Inspired by their brilliant captain, Diego Maradona, Argentina won the World Cup for only the second time in their history.
Keir Radnedge reported in the July 1986 edition of *World Soccer*: "Maradona was not only the winning captain, he was the star of the tournament and he provided moments of magic and inspiration which left every other player – yes, even Frenchman Michel Platini – looking pedestrian by contrast."

● RIVER PLATE, 1986

River Plate won the Argentinian league, the Libertadores Cup and the World Club Cup in what remains the most successful season in the club's history. Oscar Ruggeri, Claudio Caniggia and Enzo Francescoli, leading scorer in the league but transferred before River won the Libertadores, were the key men under coach Hector Veira.

● HOLLAND, 1988

After so many years of promise, Holland eventually succeeded on the international stage when, again coached by that magician of football Rinus Michels, a team containing the talents of Ruud Gullit, Marco Van Basten, Ronald Koeman, Arnold Muhren and Frank Rijkaard won the European Championship.
In July 1988 issue of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "Rinus Michels refuses to talk about 1974. He knows the dangers of glib headlines comparing one generation with another. But 1974 was directly relevant to 1988 because the likes of Gullit, Rijkaard, Koeman and Van Breukelen were impressionable young hero-worshippers growing up at a time when total football held the world game in thrall."

● MILAN, 1989-90

Arrigo Sacchi's team at the turn of the decade were regarded as Milan's finest and one of the greatest ever in the world. Sacchi had the ability to marry the flair of the Dutch triumvirate of Ruud Gullit, Frank Rijkaard and Marco Van Basten to the traditional Italian style epitomised by the likes of Franco Baresi, Paolo Maldini and Roberto Donadoni. They won the Serie A title in 1988, but it was the European Cup successes of 1989 and 1990 that sets this team apart from so many that went before and have gone since. Two goals a piece from Gullit and Van Basten secured the first success against Steaua Bucharest and, a year later, a solitary Frank Rijkaard goal made it two in a row.

The future's bright...Holland in 1988

"Arrigo Sacchi married the flair of the Dutch to the traditional Italian style"

● **RED STAR BELGRADE, 1991**

Became the only club from Yugoslavia to win the European Cup when they defeated Marseille on penalties. They reached the Final by taking the game to the opposition, beating Dynamo Dresden and Bayern Munich in the quarter- and semi-finals respectively, and playing some dynamic attacking football, led by the mercurial talents of Dejan Savicevic and Robert Prosinecki. That made their negative performance against Marseille in the Final all the more mystifying.

● **BARCELONA, early 1990s**

Under Johan Cruyff, Barcelona won La Liga in 1991 and the European Cup for the first time in the club's history, the following year at Wembley.

In June 1992 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "All those readers who were with us in October

National first...Red Star Belgrade

1960 will know that this is where *World Soccer* came in....poised for Barcelona to win the most prestigious trophy in club football.

"Together we have watched and reported the game's most outrageous soap opera: wondered at the vulgarity of so much money wasted over so many years; offered two cheers for each victory in the Cup-winners Cup, Fairs Cup, Spanish Championship and Spanish Cup; knowing, all the while, that the value of even these titles was nothing compared with the one which got away again and again.

"But the glitter of history had to wait until Wembley. And how coolly Barcelona took it."

● **DENMARK, 1992**

The Danes shocked everyone when they got a last minute place at Euro 92, due to political problems in Yugoslavia, and ended up walking away with the trophy after beating Germany 2-0 in the Final.

In August 1992 edition of *World Soccer*, Jim Holden wrote: "Denmark celebrated their triumph with an open top bus ride down Hans Christian Andersen Boulevard in Copenhagen. That was appropriate, for football's ugly ducklings, dismissed by every expert, had given the tournament grace and greatness as they matured into soccer swans."

● **SAO PAULO, 1992-93**

Twice world club champions under Tele Santana, Sao Paulo also won the Libertadores Cup in those same years and the Brazilian title in 1991.

In September 1992 edition of *World Soccer*, Brian Homewood wrote: "The team play with the seemingly carefree style which used to be the hallmark of the Brazilian game and made it famous worldwide, but which nowadays is becoming sadly second rate. Best of all, Sao Paulo prove that even today, playing attractive football can yield results."

"Manchester United's late, late goals in Camp Nou completed a unique English treble"

● **AJAX, 1994-96**

Having already led Ajax to UEFA Cup success in 1992, Louis Van Gaal's team of predominantly young Dutch players won three Eredivisie titles in a row, going the whole of the 1994-95 season unbeaten. But the highlight was their 1995 Champions League triumph, when a Patrick Kluivert goal was enough to beat Milan. They reached the Final again the following year, but lost to Juventus on penalties.

● **FRANCE, 1998**

France, as hosts, became world champions for the first time with a 3-0 victory over Brazil in the Final. Zinedine Zidane was the inspiration for *Les Bleus* in a side that included Didier Deschamps, Fabien Barthez, Laurent Blanc, Marcel Desailly, Emmanuel Petit and Youri Djorkaeff.

In August 1998 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "France are no longer the entertaining nearly men of world football. They can still entertain, as they proved the length and breadth of 'their' 1998 World Cup, but they can also apply themselves mentally and physically to the paramount challenge of winning."

World champs...Sao Paulo celebrate their 1992 World Club win

Home victory...France win the World Cup

● **MANCHESTER UNITED, 1999**

Alex Ferguson led Manchester United to their second European Cup in dramatic fashion, beating Bayern Munich with two late, late goals in the Camp Nou. That victory, without Paul Scholes and their never-say-die skipper Roy Keane, completed the treble – the first time an English club had won all three trophies.

● **REAL MADRID, 2002**

When Vicente Del Bosque led Real Madrid to a ninth European Cup success at Hampden Park, courtesy of a Zinedine Zidane volley, Real Madrid of 2002 joined the list of all-time great teams. But the following year Del Bosque, whose contract had expired, was gone along with captain Fernando Hierro. Florentino Perez took over as president and embarked on his galacticos project.

Match winner...Zidane

Libertadores 2003...Tevez (right) celebrates

● **BOCA JUNIORS, 2000-03**

One of the finest teams to come out of Argentina, Boca won the Libertadores Cup three times in four years, the Argentinian apertura and the World Club Cup in both 2000 and 2003.

In December 2003 edition of *World Soccer*, Eric Weil wrote: "Boca rely more on teamwork than individual brilliance – hence a skilful player like Tevez stands out from the rest."

● **BRAZIL, 2002**

This was the Brazil team of Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo. Luis Felipe Scolari had them well organised with Gilberto Silva anchoring the midfield, Lucio commanding at the back and full-backs Cafu and Roberto Carlos attacking the flanks and giving the "three R's" plenty of space to create and score goals.

● **GREECE, 2004**

Greece shocked the footballing world when they won Euro 2004 in Portugal. A team built on work-rate rather than skill twice beat the host nation and also eliminated holders France.

In August 2004 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "Take any tournament shy on technique or talent or class and football history records how organisation, discipline and hard work can win the day.

"The surprise of Euro 2004 was that Greece made those qualities count rather than any one of the usual quota of northern European pretenders."

● **IRAQ, 2007**

An unlikely contender, but worthy of their place after this war-torn nation achieved the unthinkable by winning the Asian Cup Final. Four days earlier, over 50 Iraqi fans had been killed by a bomb in the Mansour area of Baghdad. Iraq's players themselves overcame personal terror including the car bombing of the team physio, the death of goalkeeper Noor Sabri's brother-in-law and the killing of midfielder Hawar Mulla Mohammed's stepmother, to defeat Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the Final.

In September 2007 edition of *World Soccer*, Michael Church wrote: "Saudi Arabia were seeking a record fourth continental title, and few pundits gave the Iraqis much hope against a side that had impressed in knocking out defending champions Japan in the semi-finals. After the game [captain] Younis Mahmoud said: 'A mother of one of the victims [of the Mansour bombs] said she had not wept over her child's dead body but had declared: 'I present my son as a sacrifice to the Iraqi national team.' So we had to win."

● **SPAIN, 2008-10**

After winning the 2008 European Championship in Austria and Switzerland, Spain became only the second team to follow up such an achievement by winning the World Cup, triumphing over an over-physical Holland in July 2010.

Keir Radnedge wrote in the July 2008 edition of *World Soccer*: "In defeating Germany, they apologised in style for years of underperforming at major finals – securing their second European title 44 years after their first, their only previous trophy win, and in their first Final since 1984. Victory finally provided fulfilment for a country that has had to rely for international jewels on the club glories of Real Madrid and Barcelona."

Spain became only the second team to follow Euro success with the World Cup

Asian Cup captain...Younis Mahmoud

Viva Espana...goalkeeper Iker Casillas lifts the trophy at Euro 2008

● **BARCELONA, 2009**

Barcelona achieved a first-ever treble of Champions League, La Liga and Spanish Cup in coach Pep Guardiola's debut season as a team containing such talents as Lionel Messi, Xavi, Andres Iniesta and Samuel Eto'o swept aside every opponent in every competition. An emphatic 6-2 league win away to rivals Real Madrid set Barca up for the treble.

Sid Lowe takes up the story in the July 2009 issue of *World Soccer*: "It wasn't that Barcelona defeated Real Madrid, it was that they handed out a thrashing to finally end it all and put a definitive stop to the debate and the stirring. It was the first time Barcelona had ever scored six against Madrid and only the second time Madrid had conceded six at home in their entire history. And in truth it could have been 10 and Messi could have got five."

● **INTERNAZIONALE, 2010**

After a 45-year gap since they were last crowned club champions of Europe, Jose Mourinho's Inter – whose starting line-up didn't contain a single Italian player – beat Bayern Munich 2-0 in the Champions League Final to claim their third trophy of the season.

In June 2010 edition of *World Soccer*, Keir Radnedge wrote: "Mourinho continues to write not only all his own scripts but other people's as well; thus Inter's achievement was a demonstration of the power of destiny and also of dynasty. In 1964 and 1965 Inter's players had celebrated along with Angelo Moratti; now a new generation celebrated with another presidential Moratti in Massimo, Angelo's son." ■

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SIX OF THE BEST SUMM

Nick Bidwell on half a dozen of the most promising close-season deals

Cesar AZPILICUETA
MARSEILLE

MARSEILLE technical director Jose Anigo pulled off quite a coup in persuading the Osasuna and Spain Under-21 right-back to sign a four-season contract with the 2009-10 Ligue 1 winners.

Rated one of the most promising young players in Iberia, Azpilicueta was high on the wanted list of many top European clubs (including Manchester United, Manchester City, Arsenal and Barcelona), but star-struck the modest youngster certainly is not and he concluded that a £7million switch to the Stade Velodrome that offers him the best of all possible worlds: regular first-team football, Champions League action and the opportunity to work with such an outstanding coach as Didier Deschamps.

Very attack-minded, he has been a mainstay of the Osasuna line-up for the past three years and was included in Spain's preliminary 30-man World Cup 2010 squad, though he did not make the final cut. Early in his career he was a central midfielder, only switching to full-back during an injury crisis at the club.

Emir BAJRAMI
TWENTE

WITH the Slovak left-winger Miroslav Stoch moving on in May after a season-long loan, Dutch champions Twente must have thought initially that they might struggle to find a decent replacement. But where there's a will – and some spare funds – there's a way and the Enschede club look to have filled the void with the 22-year-old Sweden international Bajrami, who was prised away from Elfsborg in exchange for £2.9million.

Born in Kosovo but raised in Sweden, the tricky and fleet-footed flank operative had spent his entire career at Elfsborg and has been particularly to the fore in the last couple of Allsvenskan campaigns, earning himself call-ups to his adopted country's under-21 and senior sides.

While more of a maker than taker of chances – in his four years in the Elfsborg first team he has recorded a mere 15 goals – he does boast a stinging shot from distance, a speciality he displayed when firing in a left-footed thunderbolt in the UEFA Cup against Hibernian two years ago.

EDUARDO
GENOA

ANYONE who saw Portugal's superb keeper at the World Cup in South Africa will understand just why Genoa forced their way to the front of the queue to recruit him. Besides his tremendous shot-stopping ability, bravery and good decision-making, he is intensely competitive and has a pride in his craft which few other professionals possess.

For a while this summer the rumour mill had Genoa assiduously tracking Chievo custodian Stefano Sorrentino, but that all changed as soon as word began to circulate that Eduardo's employers at Sporting Braga were ready and willing to cash in. After securing the deal, ever-voluble Genoa president Enrico Preziosi had plenty of harsh words to say about the negotiations, complaining that Braga were constantly moving the goalposts and using the Portuguese press to inflate the price.

However, the £4million fee still seems a bargain for a keeper of such quality, a player whose levels of authority and confidence have gone through the roof since returning to Braga in 2008 following loan spells at Beira-Mar and Vitoria Setubal.

ER TRANSFERS

Mehmet TOPAL
VALENCIA

IN mourning after their club sold its crown jewels – striker David Villa and midfielder David Silva – in the summer, Valencia fans are hardly likely to derive any consolation in the arrival of a defensive midfielder. But with time, they could well come to see the £5million paid to Galatasaray as money well spent indeed.

Not only can the Turkey utility man – who took part in the Euro 2008 finals – do a fine job screening the back four, he is also an expert at regaining possession, closing down space and has the rare capacity to sense imminent danger. Immensely versatile, he is more than comfortable as a centre-back or on the right-side of the engine room.

Known as "Spider" because of his long legs, he joined Galatasaray from Canakkale Dardanelspor in 2006 and to begin with was nothing more than an inconspicuous bench-warmer. Only in his second season there did his luck change, promoted to the first team when Tobias Linderoth was ruled out with a long-term injury.

Nicolas GAITAN
BENFICA

THE child from the west of Buenos Aires who, along with his brothers, used to sell flowers to train commuters, does not have cash-flow problems any more, his days of penury brought to an abrupt end by his emergence at Boca Juniors as a potentially world-class attacking midfielder and subsequent £7.9million sale to Portuguese top dogs Benfica, who could not have been more pleased when they tied him recently to a five-year deal.

Able to play on either flank or in the hole, the slightly-built 22-year-old is simply a joy to behold, deft and imaginative in his left-footed ball skills, quick over the ground and oozing vision and creativity. His idol is ex-Boca team-mate and playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme and the pair are, in many ways, two peas from the same expressive pod.

On Boca's books since the age of nine, he has three Argentina caps, winning the first of them in a friendly against Ghana last year. National coach Diego Maradona may not have found room for him in his World Cup squad, but the urchin turned star will not be on the outside looking in for long.

Robert LEWANDOWSKI
BORUSSIA DORTMUND

TOP scorer in the Polish league last term with 18 goals for Lech Poznan, the striker has definitely got a lot to live up to at his new German club, with Dortmund coach Jurgen Klopp describing him as the "most exciting player I've seen in the last 10 to 15 years" and waxing lyrical whenever asked about the 21-year-old.

"He's a great mixture of height, technique, athleticism and unselfish team play," says Klopp. "He's scored goals in large quantities at every level in Poland and I see no reason why it shouldn't be the same in the Bundesliga. He's a natural."

A snip at £4million, Lewandowski has a reputation for making an instant impact, scoring on his debut in the Polish top flight, second division, Polish Cup, UEFA Cup and national team. With Legia Warsaw and Znicz Pruszkow before joining Lech Poznan in 2008, he comes from a sporting family – his father, Krzystof, was a national judo champion and played football for second-tier Hutnik Warsaw.

Giovanni MORENO

COLOMBIA

Striker in a rich vein of form

THE FACT that the fifth-best side in South America can finish fourth in the World Cup is glowing testimony to the strength of the continent's qualification campaign. However, semi-finalists Uruguay only made it to South Africa after beating Colombia in a play-off – and their beaten opponents are determined not to miss out next time.

Hernan Dario Gomez, who took Colombia to France 98 and then steered Ecuador to their first World Cup four years later, is back in charge of *Los Cafeteros* and the first goal of his second term in charge was scored by a player who looks set to make a big contribution in Colombia's quest to rejoin the top table.

Gomez declared himself cured of dependence on a playmaker in the mould of Colombia legend Carlos Valderrama after his previous spell as national coach and his selection of the lanky, left-footed Moreno – who scored from the penalty spot against South Africa in June in Gomez's first game – reflects that choice.

Handed Valderrama's old No10 shirt, Moreno may fill the playmaker's role – and he names Argentina's Juan Roman Riquelme as one of his big influences – but he is better employed as a support striker where he is more reminiscent of Rivaldo, his other idol.

With his loping stride, Moreno is most effective close to the opposing penalty area where he can best utilise his fierce shooting and an ability to play the killer pass. Both talents were on show when he was brought into the national team towards the end of the 2010 qualifiers as he set up two goals against Ecuador and scored with a volley against Chile. While it may have been too late to save Colombia that time, the expectation is that he will be more mature and ready for the next campaign.

He began his career with Envigado, a small club in a Medellin suburb, where he recalls "the fans were mostly friends and family". The club were relegated in his debut season, but Moreno made his name spearheading promotion the following year.

In 2008 he joined Medellin powerhouse Atletico Nacional – a club, in his words, "whose dimensions are not confined to a city but the entire country". Then, after highly complex negotiations, he moved to Argentina – often an excellent finishing school for Colombians – and joined Racing this summer.

Born in Segovia, some three hours from Medellin, his father worked in the town's gold-mining industry and Moreno remembers that "some of my childhood friends have died on the job, so I consider this a dangerous activity".

Ability on the football field has given Moreno a much safer and far better-paid future; now his countrymen hope he can strike gold in four years time.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club Racing (Arg)
Country Colombia
Born July 1, 1986, in Segovia
Previous clubs Envigado, Atletico Nacional
International debut September 2009, v Ecuador
International caps 6 (3 goals)

AUSTRIA

David ALABA

Young Austrian making strides in Munich

FACT FILE

Club Bayern Munich (Ger)
Country Austria
Born June 24, 1992, in Vienna
Previous club Austria Wien
International debut October 2009 v France
International caps 3 (0 goals)

THE STORY of this brilliant creative midfielder or full-back is that of a self-confessed Bayern Munich hater who came to see the light and is now poised to star at the club he once despised.

"When I played for Austria Wien juniors, I didn't like Bayern," remembers the 18-year-old. "At tournaments the Bayern kids always had the smartest kit and the best bus. They seemed to be so pleased with themselves."

However, the green-eyed monster would not plague him for long and at the age of 16 he was more than happy to sign on for Bayern. "Munich was close to my home in Vienna, the language wasn't a problem and, above all, I knew I was going to be part of a club which stands for success and complete professionalism," explains Alaba.

Good call. He was promoted to Bayern's reserves in the summer of 2009 and soon caught the eye of new coach Louis Van Gaal, a mentor of young talent if ever there was one.

In March this year he appeared in his first Bundesliga fixture, appearing off the bench against Koln, and 72 hours later he figured in the starting line-up for a Champions League round-of-16 tie with Fiorentina. Two landmark moments, two mature and confident displays at left-back.

"Even though he doesn't think it himself, he's a left-back," stresses Van Gaal. Yet in the eyes of those who count in Austria, Alaba is, and always will be, a match-winning midfielder.

He became Austria's youngest international last year – aged 17 years and 112 days – when picked for a World Cup qualifier against France in Paris, and also featured in this summer's European Under-19 finals in France.

Like his parents – father George rapped his way to the top of the Austrian pop charts in the late 1990s, while his mother, Gina, is a former Miss Philippines – David Alaba is an achiever.

Nick Bidwell

Sebastien CORCHIA

Flying full-back with many admirers

FACT FILE

Club Le Mans
Country France
Born November 1, 1990, in Noisy-le-Sec

SINCE FRANCE was awarded the right to stage the 2016 European Championship, many a Gallic football writer has taken to predicting the host nation's line-up for those finals. And even though he was relegated from Ligue 1 with Le Mans last May, the right-back berth is nearly always allotted to 19-year-old Corchia.

Once a schoolboy boarder at France's national academy in Clairefontaine and on Le Mans' books from the age of 15, the young Parisian of Italian origin may seem, at first glance, to be a boy in a man's world. But this is no adolescent imposter. While he does need to fill out physically, he is certainly not intimidated by taller and bulkier opponents.

His style of play is often likened to that of the former France and Bayern Munich right-back Willy Sagnol. He overlaps with purpose and verve – though, by his own admission, he needs to be slightly more conservative in this area.

"My first job is to defend. I can be a little crazy, I can try to do a little too much," he admits. "I've always loved getting forward. My attitude hasn't changed. I demand the ball, push on, play one-twos, put in crosses and even take free-kicks."

France Under-21 boss Erick Mombaerts says: "He has risen rapidly because of his maturity, adaptability and positive state of mind – and the good news for him is that I can't imagine him losing those qualities.

"On a football pitch he thinks the right thoughts and takes the best options. His intelligence should take him far."

Would-be employers at Lyon, Bordeaux, Lille, Bayern Munich and Juventus would surely agree.

Nick Bidwell

FRANCE

TEN STARS OF THE LIBERTADORES CUP

This year's Libertadores has been a showcase for emerging young talent – and for some older players to show they still have plenty to offer. Tim Vickery looks at 10 players who, though already eliminated from this year's competition, leave with their reputations enhanced

Wilmer AGUIRRE

Club/Country Alianza Lima/Peru
Born October 5, 1983
Position Forward

Stocky support striker who had one night against Estudiantes when he was impossible to mark. Throughout the campaign showed there is more to him than the timid figure who failed to shine with Metz in France. Joined San Luis of Mexico in May.

Victor AYALA

Club/Country Libertad/Paraguay
Born January 1, 1988
Position Wing-back

Plays on the right and strikes the ball exceptionally well, scoring two superb long-range goals and carrying a threat with his crosses and set-pieces.

Sebastian COATES

Club/Country Nacional/Uruguay
Born October 7, 1990
Position Defender

Giant, gangling centre-back happy to take on plenty of defensive responsibility and whose 6ft 5in frame is very useful in both penalty areas. Still a bit coltish and clumsy on the ground.

ELIAS

Club/Country Corinthians/Brazil
Born May 16, 1985
Position Midfielder
All-rounder with good lung power who times his forward bursts well, combining neatly with Ronaldo. The country's president, Lula, is among those pushing his international claims.

Jose Carlos FERNANDEZ

Club/Country Alianza Lima/Peru
Born May 14, 1983
Position Forward

A flop in Russia and Belgium but a huge Libertadores success, getting his career back on track with seven goals in the competition. Always dangerous in the air and surprisingly neat on the ground, he has been dubbed "the Peruvian Ibrahimovic".

Rodolfo GAMARRA

Club/Country Libertad/Paraguay
Born December 10, 1988
Position Forward

Tricky little support striker who uses the flanks well, is highly dangerous in one-on-one situations and packs a powerful shot. Scored five goals and forced his way into Paraguay's World Cup squad.

Leiton JIMENEZ

Club/Country Independiente Medellin/Colombia
Born April 26, 1989
Position Defender
Medellin were eliminated in the group phase but conceded just four goals in six games – a statistic in no small part explained by the form of this lithe centre-back who is quick, with good timing in the tackle and a sound sense of covering.

Matias MIRABAJE

Club/Country Racing/Uruguay
Born March 6, 1989
Position Midfielder

Elegant, well-built attacking midfielder with an excellent left foot. He can also drop back and help out in defence. A graduate of Uruguay's promising 2009 World Youth Cup squad.

James RODRIGUEZ

Club/Country Banfield (Arg)/Colombia
Born July 12,1991
Position Midfielder

Colombian teenager who confirmed the promise shown while helping Banfield to their historic title-winning campaign in Argentina. Strong, left-footed midfielder with pace and versatility who weighed in with five goals during the tournament. An outstanding revelation who moved to Portugal to join Porto in July.

THIAGO RIBEIRO

Club/Country Cruzeiro/Brazil
Born February 24, 1986
Position Forward

Rangy striker whose threat and versatility was highlighted by his eight goals in the competition. Outpacing defenders, sudden long shots, headers and free-kicks, they came from a variety of sources and, having already had spells in France and Qatar, he now looks ready for a major move back to Europe.

Glory night...Aguirre

Set-piece expert...Ayala

Giant presence...Coates

Presidential backing...Elias

Ibrahimovic style...Fernandez

Flank raider...Gamarra

Good timing...Jimenez

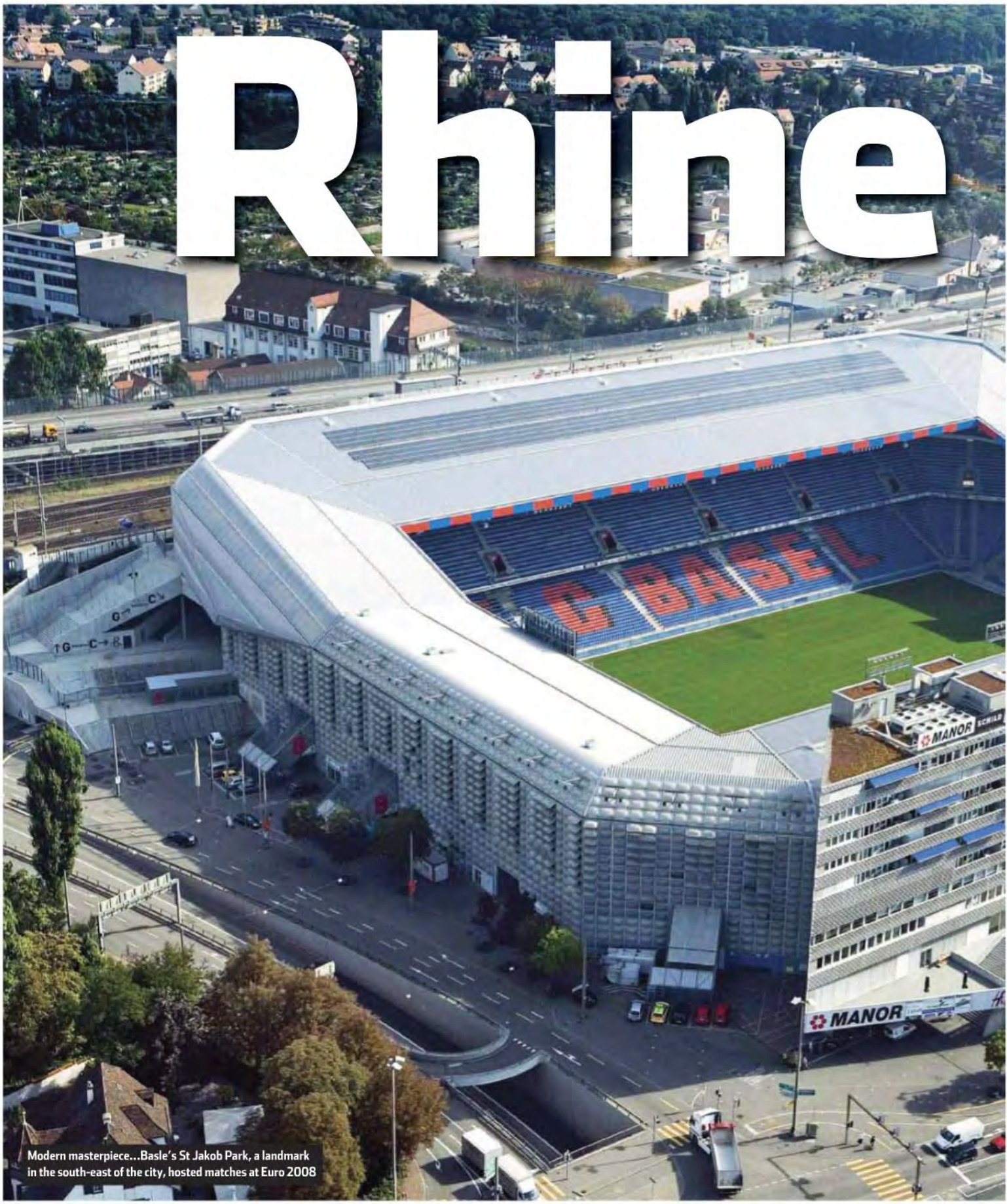
By the left...Mirabaje

Versatile...Rodriguez

Goals from everywhere...Thiago Ribeiro

BASLE The clubs, the history, what to see, how to get there

Rhine



Modern masterpiece...Basle's St Jakob Park, a landmark in the south-east of the city, hosted matches at Euro 2008

time

Peterjon Cresswell visits the home city of the reigning Swiss champions

BASLE MAY ADJOIN France and Germany, but this Rhine river port is the hotbed of Swiss football. St Jakob Park, home of current champions FC Basle, has the country's most fiery atmosphere – hence its choice for the opening match and a semi-final during Euro 2008. The venue, nicknamed "Joggeli", will also host the Euro 2012 qualifiers against England in September and Wales the following month.

Champions League football is also a distinct possibility, provided the *RotBlau* can make the group stage they last reached in 2008, when they gained a creditable 1-1 draw at the Camp Nou against the European champions-to-be, Barcelona.

End of Gross era

It was in 1893 that Hans Kamper and a handful of others answered a classified ad placed in the local paper asking for players to form a team. Kamper was an early club captain and six years later he placed a similar ad in the paper and founded FC Barcelona, changing his name to Joan Gamper.

It was 40 years before Basle notched their first major honour, beating Grasshopper 4-3 in the Swiss Cup Final, instigating a long and bitter rivalry between the two clubs. A first league title didn't come until 60 years after *RotBlau's* foundation.

The club's first golden era is considered to be the 1960s and 1970s,

Generation game...Switzerland fans tuck in before the World Cup qualifier with Greece in Basle

THE STADIUM

ST JAKOB PARK

St Jakob Park, or "Joggeli", holds 42,500. Two miles south-east of the city centre on the No14 tram route, it was built on the site of the St Jakob Stadium that hosted several games in the 1954 World Cup. It was inaugurated in 2001, the centrepiece of a shopping complex, with the Euro 2008 media centre next door being converted into apartments.

Behind Stand A are Italian restaurant Uno and the Hattrick Sport Bar, offering burgers, beers and a children's menu. FCB's average attendance of 23,500 is the highest in Switzerland, and games with Zurich and Grasshopper the most passionate.

Tickets can be booked online from www.ticketing.fcb.ch. The best seats (about SF75) are in Stand A, while those above the corner flags are about SF40.

with seven titles in 13 years. Having started with another cup win over Grasshopper in 1963, FCB ("eff-tsay-bey") hit a purple patch under coach Helmut Benthaus. With stalwart national captain Karl Odermatt and later managerial legend Ottmar Hitzfeld providing and scoring goals, FCB were a force to be reckoned with. A title win (by one point over Zurich) in 1967 was followed by another in 1969, before FCB were pipped by Grasshopper in 1971. With Hitzfeld leading the line, Basle won back-to-back championships in 1972 and 1973, and played with reasonable distinction in Europe until Benthaus left in 1982.

Champion goal...Chipperfield scores against Young Boys

A long fallow period was marked by relegation and lower-league football until promotion in 1994. A second golden era came under Christian Gross, when money was pumped into the club towards the end of the decade. It coincided with the construction of St Jakob Park, from 1998 to 2001, by which time FCB were heading for their first league title for more than two decades. Under Gross, the club did the double in 2002, with Basle-born striker Hakan Yakin scoring a goal every other game in the title run. Yakin then dropped back to allow Argentinian strike pair Julio Rossi and Christian Gimenez to star in the subsequent Champions League campaign, beating Celtic on away goals and Liverpool in the first group stage. The decisive 3-3 draw at home to the Reds was one of the most memorable in the club's history. A draw at Manchester United and a win at home to Juventus were not enough to progress but Basle became a name to be feared in Europe.

> **"Basle-born Hakan Yakin scored in every other game in the 2002 title run-in"**

Despite the loss of Yakin, Rossi and Gimenez, FCB continued to win titles, the rivalry

with FC Zurich boiling over into a riot in the title decider of 2006. With the *RotBlau* on a record unbeaten run at the Joggeli, and holding back-to-back championships, FCZ's Iulian Filipescu scored a last-minute winner to steal the crown. During the subsequent pitch invasion, Filipescu was attacked and incidents went on into the night. Fortunately Basle managed to host a successful Euro 2008, immediately after a fine domestic double.

End of Gross era

The club made the Champions League group stage in 2008-09, but found Barcelona, Shakhtar Donetsk and Sporting Lisbon too tough. A third-place finish in the league saw the end of the Gross era after a memorable 10 years of regular success and constant European appearances.

Ex-Bayern star Thorsten Fink replaced Gross, signing Alexander Frei from Borussia Dortmund and blooding several players from FCB's youth set-up – an academy which is the envy of Switzerland. The club lost out in the Europa League after close games with Roma and Fulham, but at home swept all before them. Fittingly, it was club legend and Australia midfielder Scott Chipperfield who scored in the title decider with Young Boys and the Cup Final against Lucerne.

Fink remains in place for 2010-11, looking to 18-year-old youth product Xherdan Shaqiri for swift flank play, while fiery Argentinian goalkeeping captain Franco Costanzo starts his sixth season between the sticks at the Joggeli. ●

Living with the best...Basle's Eren Derdiyok (left) challenges Barcelona's Lionel Messi during the 2008-09 Champions League campaign

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Swiss adventure

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Basle-Mulhouse-Freiburg airport is in France, five miles north-west of Basle city centre. The No50 bus (SF7, 20mins) runs to the main Basle SBB station, most of which stands in Switzerland. A taxi will cost about SF35. The city is divided by the Rhine into residential Kleinbasel and lively Grossbasel. The centre is walkable, but booking into any city-centre hotel entitles you to free local transport for the duration of your stay.

● HOTELS & INFORMATION

The tourist office is on the main square of Barfusserplatz (+41 61 268 6868, www.baseltourismus.ch). The landmark hotel is the Drei Konige (Blumenrain 8, +41 61 260 5050, www.drei-koenige-basel.ch, SF700), which has been accommodating travellers since the 11th century. The Teufelhof (Leonhardsgraben 47, +41 61 261 1010, www.teufelhof.com, SF400) is ambitiously imaginative, with original works of art in each room of the main section. Riverside Rheingasse is lined with hotels.

● EATING & DRINKING

Barfusserplatz is lined with restaurants and cafes. The Cafe des Arts (+41 61 273 5737) is a cultured spot for coffee or lunch. Opposite, Zum Braunen Mutz (+41 61 261 3369) serves traditional local cuisine, while the authentically retro cafe Rio (+41 61 261 3472) is where generations of locals congregate. The nearby Kunsthalle Restaurant (Steinenburg 7, +41 61 272 4233) offers more substantial cuisine in an arty setting. The top table in town is the Bruderholz Stucki (Bruderholzallee 42, +41 61 361 8222, www.stucki-bruderholz.ch), set in a grand mansion surrounded by greenery. Discerning barhoppers might enjoy the Atlantis (Klosterberg 13, +41 61 228 9696, www.atlan-tis.ch), while the Kaserne (Klybeckstrasse 1B, www.kaserne-basel.ch) offers DJs and live acts.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

Behind Barfusserplatz is the Munster cathedral, built in the 12th and 13th centuries. Just across Steinenberg is the Kunstmuseum (St Alban-Graben 16, +41, 61 206 6262, www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch). For a trip along the river, the local ferry company (www.bpg.ch) runs services into Germany. Freie Strasse, Gerbergasse and Steinenvorstadt are lined with shops and boutiques, while Globus on Marktplatz should cater for most needs.

● FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

• St Jakob Park

Aug 14 Basle v Lucerne
Aug 28 Basle v Neuchatel Xamax
Sep 7 Switzerland v England
Sep 22 Basle v Grasshopper

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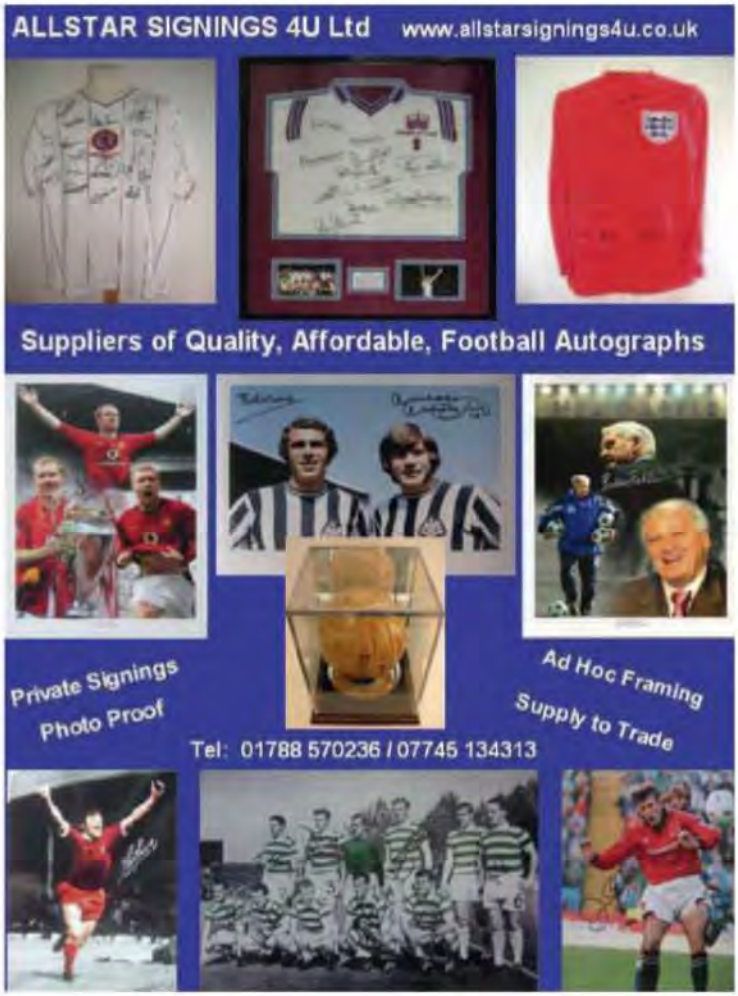

WORLD SERVICE

THE ULTIMATE GLOBAL NEWS AND RESULTS SECTION

African tussle

Mohamed Amine Aoudia (left) of Algeria's JS Kabylie tries to find a way past defender Ibrahim Yehia of Egypt's Ismaila in their opening game in Group B of this year's African Champions League. More information, page 113

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PEOPLE in the news

End of an era...defeat against Germany in South Africa sealed Maradona's fate

Maradona accuses AFA of betrayal

A BITTER DIEGO MARADONA launched a scathing attack on the Argentinian Football Association (AFA) after his contract as coach of the national team was not renewed.

Maradona accused team director Carlos Bilardo of betrayal and said that Bilardo had worked "in the shadows" to get rid of him.

Maradona added that AFA president Julio Grondona had asked him to continue, but wanted him to work without seven of his assistants. Maradona said he could not meet those conditions.

"They called me to put out a fire and we put it out," Maradona told a press conference in Buenos Aires. "Grondona lied to me. Bilardo betrayed me. While we were still in mourning [over the loss to Germany], Bilardo worked in the shadows to throw me out."

Maradona said he had been assured that his job was safe following Argentina's World Cup exit. "My technical team and I were prepared to keep going," he added.

"Grondona, in the changing room in South Africa, said in front of witnesses that he was very happy with my work and wanted me to continue. But back in Argentina things started to change.

"After five minutes, he told me that he wanted me to continue, but that seven of my technical staff could not stay. When he told me this, he was saying that he didn't want me to carry on in the job.

"He knows that it is impossible for me to stay without my assistants."

Maradona's future plans remain uncertain. "I've given everything, everything," he said in a 10-minute speech, after which he declined to take questions.

"I am convinced that Argentine football needs to be in a better position. I have tried to transmit the pride that I feel, being Argentine."

They called me to put out a fire and we put it out

New Dynamo...Kuranyi

EUROPE

Russian clubs in spending spree

Outside of England, the biggest spending clubs in the European transfer window were Russian.

The most lucrative deal was between two Russian clubs, with striker ALEKSANDR BUKHAROV leaving Rubin for Zenit St Petersburg for a fee which Russia media reported as £9million. Zenit also signed ALEKSANDAR LUKOVIC from Udinese for £6million.

Rubin replaced Lukovic with Nigeria forward OBAFEMI MARTINS from Wolfsburg.

Spartak Moscow signed Argentinian defender NICOLAS PAREJA from Espanyol for £8.2million and Swiss side Young Boys sold striker SEYDOU DOUMBIA to CSKA Moscow, who also signed ZORAN TOSIC from Manchester United.

Other big names moving to Russia included KEVIN KURANYI, who joined Dynamo Moscow from Schalke.

OTTMAR HITZFELD will retire after his contract as Switzerland coach expires at the end of their Euro 2012 campaign.

The 61-year-old German, who led both Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich to Champions League success, was appointed Switzerland boss in 2008 and led the team to this summer's World Cup finals, where they beat eventual winners Spain 1-0 in their opening game.

Ready to go...Hitzfeld

Barcelona striker ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC has cut short his brief retirement from international football

Available again...Ibrahimovic

and made himself available to Sweden once again.

● ERWIN KOEMAN has left his post as coach of Hungary to be replaced by SANDOR EGERVARI, who guided the country to third place at the Under-20 World Cup in 2009 and has enjoyed considerable success domestically with MTK and Dunaferr.

● ROAR STRAND's goal for Norway's Rosenborg against Sandefjord in July means he is the only player to have scored in 21 consecutive seasons of any European top-flight division, putting him one ahead of Manchester United's RYAN GIGGS.

SOUTH AMERICA

● Santos have signed Barcelona striker KEIRRISON on loan for the rest of the season. The 21-year-old Brazilian joined the Spanish club from Palmeiras last summer for £11.7million.

NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICA

● Uruguay World Cup midfielder ALVARO FERNANDEZ, has joined the MLS side Seattle Sounders. The 24-year-old spent the 2010 season on loan at Universidad de Chile from Uruguayan side Nacional and has also played for clubs in Mexico, Portugal and Uruguay.

Tearful goodbye...Rueda

● REINALDO RUEDA quit as Honduras coach after the team's first-round exit in South Africa.

"Since the World Cup, the pillars of union, respect and credibility have started to weaken," he said. "The atmosphere is not the best, so we've decided to step aside." Rueda said he was considering offers to coach Ecuador and the United Araba Emirates.

● EVER ALMEIDA, who won 22 caps playing in goal for Paraguay and then coached *La Albirroja* to the quarter-finals of the 1999 Copa America, has been appointed as the new national coach of Guatemala.

AFRICA

● SAMSON SIASIA, who led Nigeria to the Olympic silver medal in 2008, is the new coach of Nigerian club side Heartland.

The 42-year-old had been tipped to succeed LARS LAGERBACK as coach of the national team. Instead, he replaces KELECHI EMETOLE, who took Heartland to the Final of last year's Champions League.

● MARCOS PAQUETA, who led Brazil's Under-17 and Under-20 sides to world titles in 2003 and managed Saudi Arabia at the 2006 World Cup finals, was named as Libya's new national coach.

Heart of the matter...Siasia

Bochum buy...Jong (left)

ASIA

● North Korea's World Cup striker JONG TAE-SE left Kawasaki Frontale of Japan to join Bochum in Germany's second tier.

● German coach WOLFGANG SIDKA has taken charge of the Iraq national team.

● Al Shabab of Saudia Arabia – who were previously reported to have offered the job of coach to DANIEL CARRENO – have appointed JORGE FOSSATI, who was sacked by Brazil's Internacional in May.

OCEANIA

● New Zealand World Cup striker SHANE SMELTZ is reported to have returned to Australia after walking out on Chinese Super League side Shandong Luneng, who he joined from A-League side Gold Coast United.

Career choice...Barron

● ANDY BARRON, the New Zealand banker who was the only amateur player to take the field at the World Cup, has retired from all levels of football to concentrate on his day job.

EUROPE

EUROPEAN UNDER-19 CHAMPIONSHIP

Hosts France snatch victory from Spain

THE senior side may be in disarray but France Under-19s can lay claim to being the best in Europe after they snatched victory from Spain in the Final of the 2010 European Championship.

The hosts came from a goal down to beat a heavily fancied Spain side thanks to an 85th-minute winner from Alexandre Lacazette.

France had gone behind to Rodrigo's first-half goal for Spain, only for Gilles Sunu to level four minutes into the second period.

Chelsea midfielder Gael Kakuta set up the winning goal with a cross for substitute Lacazette to head home.

The result was harsh on Spain, who had been the outstanding team of the tournament. They had the top scorer in Daniel Pacheco and two of the best performers in Thiago Alcantara and Sergio Canales.

Spain were comfortable 3-1 winners over England in the semi-final with goals from Pacheco – his fourth of the tournament – Keko and Canales. The final goal from Canales was cleverly set up by Thiago from a free-kick.

England, admirably coached by Noel Blake but not watched by senior manager Fabio Capello, punched above their weight with captain Matthew James leading by example.

In the other semi-final, Croatia were beaten 2-1 by France despite a strong performance by keeper Matej Delac, who is soon to join Chelsea. Cedric Bakambu's late winner was enough to take France into the Final.

The four semi-finalists, plus Austria and Portugal, who finished third in their respective groups, will represent Europe at the Under-20 World Cup in Colombia next year.

Italy and Holland were the biggest disappointments. The Dutch never recovered from losing heavily in their opening game against France. They beat England in their second game, but then fell to a late Austria penalty.

Italy drew with Croatia after losing their opening game to Portugal, but were comprehensively beaten by Spain.

John Holmesdale

The result was harsh on Spain, who had been the outstanding team and had the two best performers

Young talent...France Under-19s

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SECOND QUALIFYING ROUND

Debrecen's fightback overcomes Levadia

HUNGARIAN champions Debrecen produced an exciting comeback to beat Estonia's Levadia Tallinn 3-2 at home and progress to the third qualifying round of the Champions League.

The first leg in Tallinn ended 1-1, but Konstantin Nahk gave the visitors an early lead in the return leg. Debrecen launched a spirited fightback, scoring three times to set up a third-round meeting with Swiss champions Basle.

Dinamo Zagreb, 5-1 winners of the first leg of their second qualifying round tie against Koper, survived a second-leg comeback by the side from Slovenia, who came within one goal of making the third qualifying round.

The first-leg thrashing had prompted the retirement of Koper's 38-year-old captain Miran Pavlin, but they rallied to take a 3-0 lead over Dinamo in the second leg. The Croatian champions, despite having captain Igor Biscan sent off, held on for a 5-4 aggregate victory.

Poland's Lech Poznan were given a scare after being held 1-1 by Azerbaijan's Inter Baku, but they came through 9-8 in the penalty shoot-out.

Aktobe became the first team from Kazakhstan ever to reach the third qualifying round after they beat Georgian champions Olimpi Rustavi 3-1 on aggregate.

Welsh champions The New Saints also reached the third round with a comprehensive 4-0 thrashing of Irish side Bohemians.

There were also comfortable aggregate victories for Czech Repubic's Sparta Prague (5-0 over Latvia's Metalurgs), Austria's Salzburg (5-1 over HB of Faroe Islands), Cypriot champions Omonia (5-0 over Renova of Macedonia) and Bulgaria's Lovech (5-0 over Montenegro's Rudar).

John Holmesdale

Opener...The New Saints' Craig Jones scores against Bohemians

SQUADS EUROPEAN UNDER-19 CHAMPIONSHIP

AUSTRIA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Philip PETERMANN	03.08.91	Austria Wien
21 Christian PETROVCIC	26.02.91	Leoben

DEFENDERS

3 Emir DILAVER	07.05.91	Austria Wien
4 Mahmud IMAMOGLU	23.01.91	First Vienna
15 Lukas RATH	18.01.92	Mattersburg
5 Michael SCHIMPELSBERGER	12.02.91	Twente (Hol)

MIDFIELDERS

7 David ALABA	24.06.92	Bayern Munich (Ger)
8 Robert GUCHER	20.02.91	Genoa (Ita)
16 Raphael HOLZHAUSER	16.02.93	Stuttgart (Ger)
6 Tobias KAINZ	31.10.92	Heerenveen (Hol)
18 Christian Klem	21.04.91	Sturm Graz
10 Christoph KNASMULLNER	30.04.92	B Munich (Ger)
20 Marco MEILINGER	03.08.91	Salzburg
17 Georg TEIGL	09.02.91	Salzburg
14 Gernot TRAUNER	25.03.92	LASK

FORWARDS

11 Marco DJURICIN	12.12.92	Hertha Berlin (Ger)
19 Andreas TIFFNER	10.02.91	Austria Wien
9 Andreas WEIMANN	05.08.91	Aston Villa (Eng)

COACH

Andreas HERAF	10.08.67

CROATIA

GOALKEEPERS

1 Matej DELAC	20.08.92	Chelsea (Eng)
12 Dominik PICAK	12.02.92	Dinamo Zagreb

DEFENDERS

6 Tomislav GLUMAC	14.05.91	Zadar
13 Matej JONJIC	29.01.91	Hajduk Split
5 Renato KELIC	31.03.91	Slovan Liberec (CzR)
14 Roberto PUNCEC	27.10.91	Varazdin
3 Dario RUGASEVIC	29.01.91	Cibalia
2 Sime VRSALJKO	10.01.92	Dinamo Zagreb

MIDFIELDERS

7 Arijan ADEMI	29.05.91	Dinamo Zagreb
4 Franko ANDRIJASEVIC	22.06.91	Hajduk Split
17 Marko BICVIC	07.06.91	Basle (Swi)
18 Frano MLINAR	30.03.92	Dinamo Zagreb
8 Filip OZOBIC	08.04.91	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
15 Zvonko PAMIC	04.02.91	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
10 Mario TICINOVIC	20.08.91	Hajduk Split

FORWARDS

9 Andrej KRAMARIC	19.06.91	Dinamo Zagreb
16 Anton MAGLICA	11.11.91	Osijek
11 Ante VUKUSIC	04.06.91	Hajduk Split

COACH

Ivica GRNJA	26.04.49

ENGLAND

GOALKEEPERS

13 Lee NICHOLLS	05.10.92	Wigan Athletic
1 Declan RUDD	16.01.91	Norwich City

DEFENDERS

6 Nathan BAKER	23.04.91	Aston Villa
3 Matthew BRIGGS	19.03.91	Fulham
15 Reece BROWN	01.11.91	Manchester United
5 Steven CAULKER	29.12.91	Tottenham Hotspur
2 Nathaniel CLYNE	05.04.91	Crystal Palace
14 Thomas CRUISE	09.03.91	Arsenal
*19 Scott MALONE	25.03.91	Wolves
16 Josh THOMPSON	25.02.91	Celtic

MIDFIELDERS

12 John BOSTOCK	15.01.92	Tottenham Hotspur
4 Matthew JAMES	22.07.91	Manchester United
7 Jacob MELLIS	08.01.91	Chelsea
8 Dean PARRETT	16.11.91	Tottenham Hotspur
17 Matt PHILLIPS	13.03.91	Wycombe Wanderers

FORWARDS

10 Nathan DELFOUNESO	02.02.91	Aston Villa
18 Ryan DONALDSON	01.05.91	Newcastle United
9 Ryan NOBLE	06.11.91	Sunderland
11 Frank NOUBLE	24.09.91	West Ham United

COACH

Noel BLAKE	12.01.62

(* called up as an injury replacement during tournament)

FRANCE

GOALKEEPERS

16 Abdoulaye DIALLO	30.03.92	Rennes
1 Marc VIDAL	03.06.91	Toulouse

DEFENDERS

18 Gaetan BUSSMANN	02.02.91	Metz
5 Sebastien FAURE	03.01.91	Lyon
14 Timothee KOLODZIEJCZAK	01.10.91	Lyon
2 Loic NEGO	15.01.91	Nantes
4 Johan MARTIAL	30.05.91	Bastia
3 Chris MAVINGA	26.05.91	Liverpool (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

13 Francis COQUELIN	13.05.91	Arsenal (Eng)
8 Gueida FOFANA	16.05.91	Le Havre
15 Enzo REALE	07.10.91	Lyon

FORWARDS

17 Cedric BAKAMBU	11.04.91	Sochaux
11 Antoine GRIEZMANN	21.03.91	Real Sociedad (Spa)
6 Clement GRENIER	07.01.91	Lyon
7 Gael KAKUTA	21.06.91	Chelsea (Eng)
12 Alexandre LACAZETTE	28.05.91	Lyon
10 Gilles SUNU	30.03.91	Arsenal (Eng)
9 Yannis TAFER	11.02.91	Lyon

COACH

Francis SMERECKI	29.07.49

HOLLAND

GOALKEEPERS

16 Steffen BAKKER	14.089.91	Groningen
*21 Marco BIZOT	10.03.91	Ajax
1 Jeroen ZOET	06.01.91	PSV

DEFENDERS

12 Tim EEKMAN	05.08.91	Excelsior
5 Bruno MARTINS INDI	08.02.92	Feyenoord
3 Imad NAJAH	19.02.91	PSV
4 Erik SCHOUTEN	16.08.91	AZ
2 Ricardo VAN RHIJN	13.06.91	Ajax

MIDFIELDERS

8 Leandro BACUNA	21.08.91	Groningen
19 Steven BERGHUIS	19.12.91	Twente
6 Jordy CLASIE	27.06.91	Excelsior
15 Davy PROPPER	02.09.91	Vitesse
18 Rodney SNEIJDER	31.03.91	Ajax
10 Rick VAN HAAREN	21.06.91	Feyenoord

FORWARDS

11 Jerson CABRAL	03.01.91	Feyenoord
9 Luc CASTAIGNOS	27.09.92	Feyenoord
13 Lorenzo EBICILIO	24.09.91	Ajax
17 Florian JOZEFZOON	09.02.91	Ajax
7 Rajiv VAN LA PARRA	04.06.91	Caen (Fra)

COACH

Wim VAN ZWAM	30.10.56

(* called up as an injury replacement during tournament)

ITALY

GOALKEEPERS

1 Simone COLOMBI	01.07.91	Atalanta
12 Mattia PERIN	10.11.92	Genoa

DEFENDERS

13 Andrea ADAMO	23.04.91	Palermo
3 Michelangelo ALBERTAZZI	07.01.91	Milan
5 Riccardo BROSCO	03.02.91	Roma
6 Luca CALDIROLA	01.02.91	Vitesse (Hol)
2 Alessandro CRESCENZI	25.09.91	Roma
15 Alessandro MALOMO	12.04.91	Roma

MIDFIELDERS

8 Andrea BERTOLACCI	11.01.91	Roma
17 Marco D'ALESSANDRO	17.02.91	Roma
11 Cristian GALANO	01.04.91	Bari
7 Jacopo SALA	05.12.91	Chelsea (Eng)
4 Roberto SORIANO	08.02.91	Empoli
16 Max TADDEI	18.04.91	Fiorentina
14 Luca TREMOLADA	25.11.91	Piacenza

FORWARDS

10 Fabio BORINI	29.03.91	Chelsea (Eng)
9 Mattia DESTRO	20.03.91	Internazionale
18 Nicolao DUMITRU	12.10.91	Empoli

COACH

Massimo PISCEDDA	14.03.62

PORTUGAL

GOALKEEPERS

12 CLAUDIO Ramos	16.11.91	Guimaraes
1 Tiago MAIA	18.09.92	Porto

DEFENDERS

2 Joao AMORIM	26.07.92	Vitoria
3 Anibal CAPELA	08.05.91	Sporting Braga
8 CEDRIC	31.08.91	Sporting Lisbon
16 MARIO RUI	27.05.91	Benfica
4 NUNO REIS	31.01.91	Sporting Lisbon
5 RODERICK	30.03.91	Benfica

MIDFIELDERS

6 AGOSTINHO CA	24.07.93	Sporting Lisbon
15 DANILO	09.09.91	Benfica
18 RUBEN PINTO	24.04.92	Benfica
10 SANA	29.12.91	Benfica
17 SERGIO OLIVEIRA	02.06.92	Porto

FORWARDS

14 ALEX	27.08.91	Porto
9 Amido BALDE	16.05.91	Sporting Lisbon
13 EVANDRO Brandao	07.05.91	Benfica
7 NELSON OLIVEIRA	08.08.91	Benfica
11 SALVADOR AGRA	11.11.91	Varzim

COACH

Ilidio VALE	13.12.57

SPAIN

GOALKEEPERS

13 AITOR	03.05.91	Athletic Bilbao
1 ALEX	03.02.91	Barcelona

DEFENDERS

4 Marc BARTRA	15.01.91	Barcelona
12 HUGO MALLO	22.06.91	Celta Vigo
15 Ramiro MAYOR	09.05.91	Real Zaragoza
2 Martin MONTOYA	14.04.91	Barcelona
3 Carles PLANAS	04.03.91	Barcelona
5 Jorge PULIDO	08.04.91	Atletico Madrid

MIDFIELDERS

16 Ezequiel CALVENTE	12.01.91	Real Betis
10 Sergio CANALES	16.02.91	Real Madrid
7 KEKO	27.12.91	Atletico Madrid
17 KOKE	08.01.92	Atletico Madrid
6 ORIOL ROMEU	24.09.91	Barcelona
11 Daniel PACHECO	05.01.91	Liverpool (Eng)
8 THIAGO Alcantara	11.04.91	Barcelona

FORWARDS

14 Iker MUNIAIN	19.12.92	Athletic Bilbao
18 Ruben ROCHINA	23.03.91	Barcelona
9 RODRIGO	06.03.91	Real Madrid

COACH

Luis MILLA	12.03.66

AUSTRIA BUNDESLIGA 2010-2011

On our way...Salzburg new boy Zarate celebrates after scoring in a Champions League qualifier

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 17, 2010**
Winter break **December 12, 2010 to February 11, 2011**
Season ends **May 24, 2011**

THE Austrian football season kicked off earlier than most other countries in Europe and already the hunt is on to catch **Salzburg**.

Once again, the defending champions are favourites; and once again they have been allowed to spend big by club owner, energy drink tycoon Dietrich Mateschitz.

They have signed Argentinian forward Gonzalo Zarate, Dutch midfielder David Mendes, Uruguay Under-20 ace Joaquin Boghossian and youngster Niclas Heimann from Chelsea, as well as Austria internationals Jakob Jantscher and Stefan Hierlander.

"Defending our national title is a must. However, our main focus is reaching the Champions League group stage," says coach Huub Stevens.

Boghossian was a late signing to compensate for the departure of towering striker Marc Janko. After an incredible 57 goals in two seasons for Salzburg, Janko was signed by Dutch champions Twente, leaving a massive gap up front.

"Boghossian is even an inch taller than Marc. He is technically skilled, young and hungry, so he is the perfect successor," added Stevens.

Salzburg's fiercest rivals should be **Austria Wien**, who finished as close runners-up last season and have also invested quite heavily in the transfer market. The Violets acquired international Marko Stankovic from Triestina, defensive midfielder Peter Hlinka, and Under-21 hopefuls Georg Margreitter and Patrick Salomon.

"We all know Salzburg have the best team. But we celebrate our centenary in 2011 and what better present could we give ourselves than to win the league?" argues general manager Thomas Parits. The return of long-term sidelined Slovenia playmaker Milenko Acimovic and injured Czech striker Tomas Jun should add more technical skill to their game, but that's not all.

"By signing quick young players like Stankovic and Salomon, we have also broken with a club tradition, but the game has simply become faster and if we want to beat Salzburg we must add more pace to our technical style," says coach Karl Daxbacher.

Record champions **Rapid**, on the other hand, have lost several key players, including playmaker Branko Boskovic, while star striker Nikica Jelavic has been targeted by Scottish champions Rangers. Sporting director Alfred Hoertnagl plans to land another top-class striker but head coach Peter Pacult is still sceptical about the upcoming season.

"If you sell three or four stars in two years without adding the same quality to the roster, you must expect a setback. We will see how we can avoid a drop," he says.

As has now become tradition, **Sturm** have sold some of their talented youngsters, including Jakob Jantscher (to Salzburg) and Daniel Beichler (to Hertha Berlin), but coach Franco Foda is not worried, saying: "It's part of the business that players come and go. Of course, we will miss Jakob and Daniel, but then again, it opens a gap that can be breached by two new youngsters."

Foda believes his team is ready to attack the top three after finishing fourth in four consecutive seasons.

Wiener Neustadt enjoyed an incredible first year in the top flight, finishing fifth and reaching the Austrian Cup Final, but they cannot expect this to happen every year according to coach Peter Schottel, who predicts tougher times to come. This might happen sooner rather than later as the club's patron, Austro-Canadian billionaire Frank Stronach, has indicated he may withdraw his investment.

Further down the table, **LASK** from Linz and **Ried** do not have the funds to chase a spot in Europe unless they manage a surprise cup win. They can therefore be expected to concentrate on their duel for regional dominance – Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, and Ried are less than 50 miles apart.

Kapfenberger and **Mattersburg** were tipped for relegation last season and that's the case again this term as both have turned to youth players from their own academies to cover the financial shortfalls.

> "We celebrate our centenary in 2011 and what better present could we give ourselves than to win the league?"
>
> *Austria Wien general manager Thomas Parits*

Rapid strike... Jelavic beats Wacker's Abraham

No shrinking Violet...Austria Wien's Stankovic catches Markus Schmidt of Mattersburg

Promoted **Wacker Innsbruck** should not be in danger of a bad campaign now they are back in the top division. The seven-times league champions have a bunch of talented youngsters and coach Walter Kogler has added three top-class players in Spanish defender Inaki Jauregi, Czech defensive midfielder Tomas Abraham and Slovenia striker Milan Burgic.

"Expectations in Tirol are always high and our fans want more from us than just avoiding relegation," says Kogler. "We shall see how far we can get."

Harry Miltner

For fixtures go to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/austria

BELGIUM FIRST DIVISION 2010-2011

Numbers game...Anderlecht's Argentinian recruits Barrios and Chavarria

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 30, 2010**
Winter break **December 30, 2010 to January 21, 2011**
Season ends **May 14, 2011**

WHILE the likelihood is the final stages of the continental club competitions will again feature a distinct scarcity of Belgian representatives, the country's big names will almost certainly dispute the major domestic honours once more.

Of all the European hopefuls **Anderlecht** would most like to prove the theory wrong – all the more so after their embarrassing 8-2 aggregate defeat by Lyon last season. And who is to say they cannot do so following their overwhelming title triumph last season, their 30th in all, in which they finished 12 points clear after the 28-game regular season and 18 in front of their nearest rivals following the inaugural play-offs?

The play-offs had their critics but the new format is being retained, which may only be a handicap to mauve-and-white ambitions should they embark on a lengthy run in the Champions League.

General manager Herman Van Holsbeeck must have regretted his promise that the champions would sign more Belgian players since the first three new arrivals were all foreigners: striker Pablo Chavarria and defender Pier Barrios, both from Belgrano in Argentina, and midfielder Sacha Kljestan from Chivas-USA, who made the United States' 2009 Confederations Cup squad but not their 2010 World Cup party.

Another Argentinian, striker Nicolas Frutos, has retired while Jelle Van Damme was sold to Wolverhampton Wanderers. Happily for Anderlecht fans, Mbark Boussoufa and Romelu Lukaku have been retained by coach Ariel Jacobs. Midfielder Boussoufa has been voted player of the year for the past two years by his fellow professionals, while 17-year-old Lukaku became the country's youngest-ever top goalscorer in the regular league last term.

Club Brugge were a major disappointment last time out. Whether they can make amends this time may depend largely on three new recruits: Brazilian wing-back Marcos Camozzato and French midfielder Wilfried Dalmat (both from Standard), and Serb striker Stefan Scepovic (Sampdoria). Paraguay's World Cup defender Antolin Alcaraz has left for Wigan Athletic.

The departure of the two Brazilians will not help **Standard** recover lost dignity and the Liege club were another to fall a long way short of expectations last term. Their first two title successes for 25 years (in 2008 and 2009) were followed by a dismal 2010 campaign which is unlikely to be rectified by the signing of French midfielder Franck Berrier from Zulte Waregem. Former player Sergio Conceicao is now Dominique D'Onofrio's assistant, but the pair may regret an exodus which includes Milan Jovanovic to Liverpool and Igor De Camargo to Borussia Monchengladbach. With title-winning marksman Dieumerci Mbokani still looking to move and the club out of Europe, the mood at the Stade de Sclessin is far from optimistic.

Genk and **Gent** are persevering largely with last season's squads, both of which should be good enough to challenge via the play-offs. Belgian Cup winners Gent have a new coach in Francky Dury (from Zulte Waregem), with predecessor Michel Preud'homme having succeeded Steve McClaren at Dutch champions Twente.

Cup runners-up **Cercle Brugge** have appointed Bob Peeters, the former barnstorming Millwall striker, as coach in succession to Glen De Boeck, whose switch to **Germinal Beerschot** was explained by the fact that he wanted to be nearer home. Peeters gave up his job as Gent's youth coach.

The status quo at the top could be disturbed by **Zulte Waregem** and **St Truiden**, who exceeded all expectations last season by leading the table after six games – the first time in 44 years they had been in pole position. Such an achievement, following promotion, is unlikely to be matched this time by **Eupen**, whose first-ever season in the top flight will also be their last for a while if the doom merchants are correct.

Second division champions **Lierse**, back in the top flight after three years, should be capable of at least a mid-table finish. Egyptian businessman Maged Samy has bought the club, paying off all its debts and permitting much-needed scope for coach Aime Anthuenis, better known for his stints in charge of the national team and Anderlecht.

Charleroi, **Mechelen**, **Kortrijk**, **Lokeren** and **Westerlo** will, like Lierse, hope to hover around mid-table and stay clear of the relegation zone.

Nicholas Harling

The play-offs had their critics but are being retained – which may be a handicap to Anderlecht if they go on a Champions League run

Shake on it...Club Brugge sporting director Luc Devroe greets new boy Camozzato

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/belgium

BULGARIA APFG 2010-2011

Swapping sides...former Levski coach Velev is now in charge of Slavia

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 31, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

IN contrast with previous seasons, the summer has not featured any sensational transfers of players or coaches, which means that the usual suspects are likely to contest this season's title race.

The coach of champions **Lovech**, Angel Chervenkov, kept his job despite doubts over his future and the club's main signing, Romania striker Florin Bratu, has already proved his worth when, as a second-half substitute, he scored twice in the 4-0 victory away to Montenegro's Rudar Pljevlja in the second qualifying round of the Champions League.

Runners-up last time, **CSKA** have big ambitions under new boss Pavel Dochev, who made his name with some remarkable coaching successes in Germany, notably in Paderborn, where he was voted the best coach in the club's history. Dochev has adopted a German style in training and players who don't like his disciplinarian style have been moved on. But though eager for success, CSKA fans are unhappy at high ticket prices.

Dochev has adopted a German style at CSKA and players who don't like his disciplinary style have been moved on

After their poor performance last term, **Levski** face a challenge to win back their fans. Coach Yasen Petrov is a keen student of the game and his side started the season in fine form, beating Irish side Dundalk 6-0 in the Europa League, but he lacks big-match experience in European competition.

Levski have kept most of last season's side and they will be joined by newcomers Garra Dembele, a French striker previously with Auxerre and Greek side Pierikos, and the former Beroe defender Ivo Ivanov.

The capital's two other top-flight clubs, **Slavia** and **Lokomotiv Sofia**, don't have enough strength to compete for the title and they will be happy if they secure European spots. The new coach of Slavia is Emil Velev, the former manager of Levski, who made the Blues champions in 2009.

Lokomotiv Sofia are coached by their former assistant manager Dimitar Vassev but they have lost striker Martin Kamburov to Chinese club Dalian Shide.

Cup holders **Beroe**, who are playing in Europe this season after a 24-year absence, have retained coach Ilian Iliev, despite speculation that he would leave.

The biggest transfer story was **Cherno More**'s signing of the former Porto striker Mario Jardel. The Brazilian said: "Although I am almost 37, I'll try to score the last great goals of my career to help the team to win regularly and to please the fans."

Ambitious...Balakov

Hristo Bonev, the legendary former player of **Lokomotiv Plovdiv**, remains in charge of the club, while **Chernomorets** have hired former Stuttgart star Krassimir Balakov as proof of their bigger ambitions.

Pirin, **Montana**, **Minyor** and **Sliven** will probably occupy the middle of the table, where newcomers **Akademik**, **Vidima Rakovski** and **Kaliakra** will hope to join them. Akademik from Sofia are back in the first division after a 28-year break, while Vidima Rakovski were last in the top flight 16 years ago, but Kaliakra are there for the first time.

Lokomitiv Mezdra and Sportist were relegated last season and will now play in the second division, while Botev must play in the third division as punishment for financial irregularities.

Rumen Paytashev

Still there...Chervenkov is still coach of Lovech, despite rumours in the summer that he would be on his way

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/bulgaria

CZECH REPUBLIC 1.LIGA 2010-2011

In with a shout...Krajcik could help Jablonec mount a serious challenge to Sparta

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 16, 2010**
Winter break **November 15, 2010 to February 25, 2011**
Season ends **June 12, 2011**

AFTER winning the league without losing a game last term, **Sparta Prague** have lost no significant players and the addition of Marek Matejovsky from Reading and goalkeeper Daniel Zitka from Anderlecht further strengthen Jozef Chovanec's squad. Matejovsky joins Juraj Kucka and Libor Sionko in an impressive midfield.

Runners-up last season, modest **Jablonec** look best placed to benefit if Sparta slip up. Coach Frantisek Komnacky has retained the services of last season's key players and brought in Slovakia wing-back Matej Krajcik from Slavia Prague and classy midfielder Karel Pitak, who was released by Salzburg.

Coach Miroslav Koubek guided **Banik Ostrava** to third place in his first season in charge but the departures of midfielders Mario Licka and Tomas Micola (both to Brest in France) and teenage striker Matej Vydra (to Udinese) are setbacks. To compensate and increase competition for places, Koubek has made eight new signings, including forward Zdenek Senkerik from Slavia and Plzen goalkeeper Michal Danek.

Coach Jiri Plisek has made no major changes to the **Teplice** squad, despite failing to qualify for Europe, and attacking midfielder Stepan Vachousek remains the star of a solid squad. Club legend Pavel Verbir, 37, has announced that this season will be his last, having spent his entire career at the Na Stinadlech stadium.

Viktoria Plzen qualified for Europe as Czech Cup winners and, thanks to improved sponsorship, could better last season's fifth-place league finish. At 35-years old, playmaker Pavel Horvath remains their key man.

Veteran defender Radim Kucera is back with **Sigma Olomouc** after five years with German side Arminia Bielefeld. Another former star, Marek Heinz, trained with Olomouc over the summer only to sign for Ferencvaros, but Michal Ordos, the league's leading scorer last season, is still on board. Brazilian playmaker Melinho, who has returned from an unsuccessful loan spell in Germany with Koblenz, and 17-year-old defender Tomas Kalas, who stays at Sigma on loan despite signing for Chelsea, are also available.

Bowing out...Teplice talisman Verbir

Karel Jarolim, dismissed in March, has been given another chance as **Slavia Prague** coach and must make amends for their failure to qualify for Europe. Jarolim's son, Lukas, returns from Siena as captain, but the most exciting acquisition is Karol Kisel, a former Sparta Prague midfielder signed from Sydney. Defender Jiri Koubsky, previously with St Gallen in Switzerland, could also be influential. However, resistance among fans to a groundshare with Bohemians 1905 could be a distraction.

Mlada Boleslav have brought in veteran Petr Johana from Wiener Neustadt of Austria and Macedonia Under-21 captain Vladimir Dimitrovski to strengthen their defence. In attack, Marek Kulic is expected to partner Turkish-Australian teenager Kerem Bulut, who joins Karel Stanner's team from Sydney. An improvement on last season's eighth-place finish looks likely.

Aiming to bounce back from a bitterly disappointing campaign last season, **Slovan Liberec** have brought Jiri Stajner back to the club where he made his name. The former Hannover player should form a potent partnership with Croatian striker Andrej Keric, who turned down a move to Turkish club Konyaspor, and all-time leading scorer Jan Nezmar. The loss of young midfielder Borek Dockal, on loan to Konyaspor, is a blow.

With an average age of just over 23, **Pribram** are the division's youngest squad and will probably need to maintain last season's impressive home form – 31 points from 15 games – to avoid a relegation battle. New coach Martin Hridel seems to have been hired partly because of his experience in avoiding the drop.

Karel Vecera has been brought back for a fourth spell as coach in an attempt to revive **Brno**'s flagging fortunes and the club's old Communist-era name – Zbrojovka Brno – has also been reinstated. Poor transfer policy has left the club trying to get up to 16 unwanted players off their books, but despite this they have signed Serbian defender Zdravko Kovacevic from Hajduk Belgrade while forward Marek Strestik returns from a loan spell with Sparta Prague.

Anger at **Bohemians 1905**'s decision to abandon their Dolicek home and groundshare with their neighbours Slavia Prague will make avoiding relegation even trickier. Along with a fan boycott of "home" games, coach Pavel Hoftych must also contend with a reduced budget, the league's oldest squad and captain Dalibor Slezak's retirement.

Ceske Budejovice would settle for mid-table, having narrowly avoided relegation last season. Lubos Pecka, signed from Mlada Boleslav, could provide coach Jaroslav Silhavy with a much-needed regular goalscorer.

Under former Czech youth team coach Miroslav Soukup, **Slovacko** have retained the services of forward Petr Svancara, but will rely heavily on youngsters in other areas.

Vaclav Kotal's **Hradec Kralove** squad has changed little from the one that won the second division last season. Significant building work was required to bring the club's stadium up to standard and the big challenge now is to ensure the team stays up.

Karol Jarolim has been given another chance as Slavia Prague coach and must make amends for the failure to qualify for Europe

Under pressure...Jarolim

Back in the first division for the first time since 1958, impoverished **Usti nad Labem** will play home games in Teplice. Midfielder Michal Dolezal, on loan from Teplice, will be one of the few members of Svatopluk Habanec's squad with top-flight experience and they will be favourites for relegation.

Sam Beckwith

For fixtures go to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/czechrep

DENMARK SUPERLIGA 2010-2011

Burning ambition...OB's Lars Olsen

KEY DATES

Season starts	July 17, 2010
Winter break	December 5, 2010 to March 4, 2011
Season ends	May 28, 2011

LARS OLSEN has a history of upsetting the odds – witness his leadership on the field with the Denmark side that won the 1992 European Championship after originally failing to even qualify for the tournament. So when he says he can break Copenhagen's virtual stranglehold on the Superliga, perhaps people should listen with some attention.

Olsen has been the coach of **OB Odense** for three-and-a-half years and in the past two seasons his side have been the closest challengers to Copenhagen, finishing second each time. Last season they were nine points adrift but a further seven points ahead of the rest – and are now clearly established as the most likely pretenders to the crown. Last term they had the league's top scorer in Peter Utaka and the steadiest goalkeeper in former Manchester United first choice Roy Carroll. This time they will be boosted by the return from injury of midfielder Eric Djemba-Djemba.

Can OB go one better this time? Well, their target is to win the title twice in the next four seasons – hugely ambitious given the club has only three titles in its entire history, the last of which came in 1989. Yet Lars Olsen is a serious coach – and the most likely long-term successor to Morten Olsen as national team boss.

He is unequivocal when he says: "We are fed up being just behind FC Copenhagen all the time, we are tired of finishing second. We want to overtake them now. That's our big ambition but, of course, the focus all the time must simply be on the next game.

"If we can keep that focus throughout the campaign, then I believe we can become champions this year."

After a disappointing World Cup for Denmark, a credible title challenge in the Superliga would be a welcome boost to the Danish game. But there has been precious little activity in the transfer market and that hardly augurs well for a change in the balance of power.

Copenhagen, who are strong favourites to make it seven titles in nine seasons, made the most significant signing, buying Brazilian midfielder Claudemir from Vitesse of Holland to replace Atiba Hutchinson, who left for PSV Eindhoven. It was a like-for-like move that should not diminish the team. The champions also signed goalkeeper Kim Christensen from Gothenburg.

In truth, the only other contenders appear to be **Brondby**, the eternal enigma of Danish football, who desperately need a successful season. They were revived brilliantly last term from the threat of relegation by new manager Henrik Jensen, but it will be a tough job to keep the momentum going this time, especially with no real funds to strengthen the squad. Long-term chairman Per Bjerregaard admits as much, saying: "It will be very hard for us to challenge for the top spot. I think we have to aim to be in the top three – that's the realistic target."

After the troubles of last season, when Kent Nielsen was sacked halfway through, it may well be the case. But Brondby supporters would have preferred a month or two of optimism before any realism set in. They don't want to hear that Copenhagen's dominance is all but set in stone.

It will certainly be hard going for the two promoted clubs, **Horsens** and **Lyngby**, in a league where the yo-yo effect is pronounced. Horsens have brought Allan Jepsen back from Germany to stiffen their defence, while Lyngby are trying to survive in the top flight for the second time in three seasons, having been relegated last time with just three victories in the entire campaign. For them it is amazing just to be in the Superliga after being demoted to the amateur ranks as recently as 2001 and their coach Niels Frederiksen says: "It will be tough for us, there is no point in denying that.

"We don't have a lot of money at our club compared to some of the other teams in the Superliga. But I have a feeling that maybe we are going to be underestimated, and that could help us because we have a squad that will fight to the end in every match."

SonderjyskE sold 20-year-old striker Soren Frederiksen to Copenhagen but will keep him on loan for this season. Elsewhere, the transfer saga over the future of top scorer Rajko Lekic undermined **Silkeborg**'s pre-season preparations, while **Randers** have high hopes for their Armenian pairing of Yura Movsisyan and Robert Arzumanyan.

Midtjylland sold their best player of last season, Leon Jessen, to Kaiserslautern, but they do have New Zealand World Cup hero Winston Reid in their squad.

At **Nordsjaelland** many eyes will be on Andreas Laudrup to see if Michael's son can develop into a star player too, while **Esbjerg** have vowed to keep sought-after Swedish playmaker Mikael Rynell at the club at least until the winter break.

AaB Aalborg appointed Norwegian defender Kjetil Waehler as their new captain this season but let Michael Jacobsen go to Almeria.

With clubs having to sell their best players to keep the finances ticking over, at the moment the flow of young talent seems little more than a trickle.

Jim Holden

> "We are fed up with being just behind FC Copenhagen all the time, we are tired of finishing second. We want to overtake them"
>
> *OB coach Lars Olsen hopes for a power shift in Danish football*

Champion move...Claudemir

Leader...Waehler is AaB's new skipper

For fixtures go to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/denmark

GREECE SUPER LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 28, 2010**
Season ends **June 2011**

CHAMPIONS **Panathinaikos** have a new president after 68-year-old lawyer Nikos Konstantopoulos was the surprise choice to head the club. And the new boss has backed Nikos Nioplias with a contract extension after the coach left his job with the Greece Under-21 side and led Pana to the double last season.

Nioplias has admitted that the loss of striker Dimitris Salpigidis, who has returned to his former club PAOK, was a blow, but he has been replaced by Sidney Govou, who arrived from Lyon and joins France team-mate Djibril Cisse, last season's leading scorer with 23 goals.

Olympiakos will hope to regain their dominance after winning the title 12 times in the last 14 seasons. They won the title for five years in a row between 2005 and 2009 but had a disappointing campaign last time out and finished second after going through three coaches. They then ended up bottom of the four-team play-off table and missed out on a Champions League place.

Green for go...Govou on his way to Pana

Just like their arch-rivals Panathinaikos, the Piraeus club has also made a change in its administration, with long-time owner Sokrates Kokkalis giving up his majority shareholding in the club to the much younger Vangelis Marinakis, a shipping tycoon who paid £41m for a 67 per cent stake. Kokkalis will remain as president but Marinakis is expected to be the major decision-maker.

My big Greek welcome...Rommedahl (centre) meets the Olympiakos fans

After Spanish coach Ernesto Valverde turned his back on an offer to return, Olympiakos hired former Panionios coach Ewald Lienen. The 56-year-old German has signed a two-year deal worth a reported £920,000.

Other new faces at the club are Denmark winger Dennis Rommedahl from Ajax, German defender Jose Holebas from 1860 Munich and Villarreal's Argentinian midfielder Ariel Ibagaza. However, the club's biggest signing was 28-year-old Spanish winger Albert Riera, who joined from Liverpool for an initial fee of £3.35m and on a reported salary of £2.25m a year.

Having bid farewell to Fernando Santos, who replaced Otto Rehhagel as national coach, **PAOK** hired Mario Beretta in June – only to sack him 23 days later without the Italian taking charge of a single competitive game. He paid the price for poor pre-season results and dressing-room disagreements and was replaced by Pavlos Dermitzakis.

Better news for PAOK was the return of national team star Salpigidis and the signing of Tunisia defender Anis Boussaidi from Salzburg.

AEK Athens will be relying on two veterans who have rejoined the club: striker Nikos Liberopoulos, back from Eintracht Frankfurt, and defender Traianos Dellas, who last played for Anorthosis in Cyprus.

AEK also picked up 28-year-old Uruguayan left-back Claudio Dadomo from Cerro and Senegalese midfielder Papa Bouba Diop from Portsmouth.

AEK's veteran coach Dusan Bajevic has said that the team reminds him of the good old days when he played for the club.

Aris have added Spanish goalkeeper Juanma Barrero from Alcorcon and Guatemala's all-time leading national team goalscorer Carlos Ruiz, who arrived from Mexican club Puebla.

Kavala have hired Serb coach Dragan Okuka, but their only new signing is centre-back Igor Tomasic from Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Atromitos coach Giorgos Donis, the former Greece and Blackburn Rovers midfielder, has targeted European qualification or the Greek Cup this season and he has signed Senegal striker Henri Camara to help reach those goals.

Larissa signed Nigeria striker Stephen Makinwa on loan from Lazio, former national team defender Stathis Tavlaridis, who had been playing for Saint-Etienne in France, and Uruguay's Fabian Canobbio from Real Valladolid.

LASK and Austria goalkeeper Jurgen Macho has agreed a three-year deal with **Panionios**, who have a new coach in Swede Mikael Stahre.

Iraklis, who are beset by financial problems, were unable to land any new faces, while **Ergotelis** picked up defender Giorgios Alexopoulos from AEK and Montpellier's Nigerian defender Egutu Oliseh.

Asteras signed Scottish midfielder Mark Kerr from Aberdeen, Portuguese midfielder Cris from Academica Coimbra and Croatian midfielder Goran Rubil from Hajduk Split.

Sheffield United midfielder Jordan Stewart has joined **Xanthi**.

All three newcomers to the Super League this season have added new players in a bid to stay in the top flight.

Kerkyra signed former Olympiakos defender Ieroklis Stoltidis; **Olympiakos Volos** agreed deals with Argentinians Juan Eduardo Martin, Facundo Perez Castro and Paolo Frangipane, as well as Swiss goalkeeper Eldin Jakupovic; while **Panserraikos** added Serb midfielder Nikola Beljic and Slovak goalkeeper Jan Novota to their ranks.

Lou Economopoulos

For fixtures got to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/greece

Long-time Olympiakos owner Sokrates Kokkalis has sold his majority shareholding to shipping tycoon Vangelis Marinakis

Striking signing...Liberopoulous is back with AEK

HOLLAND EREDIVISIE 2010-2011

Fully focused...PSV's Brazil-born striker Reis has put his worries behind him

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 6, 2010**
Winter break **December 20, 2010 to January 20, 2011**
Season ends **May 15, 2011**

THE contrast between Holland's World Cup success in South Africa and the poor standards of the domestic league could not be more pronounced.

While Bert Van Marwijk's men could only be stopped by Spain in the Final, the Eredivisie has suffered a series of setbacks. More clubs than ever are in financial trouble, while it has been ages since a Dutch side gained respectable results in European competition.

On top of that, the best players will again be heading for greener pastures, even after the season has started in the first week of August.

The biggest targets are World Cup stalwarts such as Gregory Van der Wiel, Maarten Stekelenburg and Luis Suarez of Ajax, AZ's Sergio Romero and Carlos Salcido of PSV, while Miroslav Stoch of Twente has already moved on to Fenerbahce.

The main question is whether Holland's traditional clubs can reclaim their place at the top of the tree. In the past two years the country has welcomed two unexpected champions, AZ and Twente, but that has meant PSV have missed out of the Champions League for the past two campaigns.

PSV certainly have the most balanced squad this season. Although veteran Timmy Simons (Nurnberg) and internationals Dirk Marcellis (AZ) and Andre Ooijer (released) have gone, new players such as Canadian midfielder Atiba Hutchinson (Copenhagen), Jeremain Lens (AZ) and Brazilian defender Marcelo (Wisla Krakow) have been shipped in. But the big change will be up front, where PSV's lack of firepower could be solved by the return of Jonathan Reis, now clean after his cocaine addiction problem last season, and the hiring of Sweden's Marcus Berg from Hamburg.

After turning down a move to Fulham, **Ajax** boss Martin Jol will probably have to wait until after the transfer window has closed to discover which players he can still call upon. Stekelenburg, Suarez and Van der Wiel could all be sold to help the club's financial situation (a deficit of £17.5million last season). However, Ajax have reportedly paid £5m to AZ for Moroccan striker Mounir El Hamdaoui.

With over 40 players under contract, including many big earners on the bench, Ajax were relieved to offload Marko Pantelic, George Ogararu, Gabri, Kennedy Bakircioglu and Dennis Rommedahl, and are still hoping Rob Wielaert, Evander Sno and Oleguer will move on as well.

Champions **Twente** will be satisfied with a top-five spot. With Stoch, Kenneth Perez and Blaise Nkufo already gone, the Enschede club face a struggle to keep key players Douglas and Bryan Ruiz. However, Steve McClaren's successor, Michel Preud'homme, still has a fine squad who can be expected to compete for the title right to the end of the season. New signing, prolific Austrian centre-forward Marc Janko, could be a contender for the league's scoring crown.

Another fourth spot will probably be the best **Feyenoord** can hope for this term since the Rotterdam club have no money to spend. The departures of Roy Makaay and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst (both retired) and Jonathan De Guzman (to Mallorca) have eased the financial situation, but a couple of youth players and unknowns such as Ruben Schaken and Adil Auassar (both from VVV) as replacements will not be enough.

Whether **AZ** can be a top-five candidate depends on the strength of their squad. In Gertjan Verbeek, who steered Heracles to an unexpected sixth position, they have the right coach, but the collapse of sponsors DSB could mean several top players have to be sold. With El Hamdaoui already sold to Ajax, it wasn't a good sign that Sergio Romero and Moussa Dembele were omitted from the squad for the Europa League qualifiers. Still, with Marcellis (AZ), Nick Viergever and Erik Falkenburg (both from relegated Sparta), the Alkmaar club can boast several of the country's brightest talents.

The surprise of the season could be **Utrecht**. Backed by the cash of Frans Van Seumeren, the owner of salvage company Mammoet, the club's goal is a permanent spot in the top five and they are making progress every year. In Ricky Van Wolfswinkel and Zambia's Jacob Mulenga they have a tandem up front which could bring success.

Heerenveen and **Groningen**, under last year's Groningen coach Ron Jans and former Rangers player Pieter Huistra respectively, will hope to compete for a Europa League ticket.

Financially troubled **NAC Breda** are probably heading in the other direction after being forced to drastically cut their budget, while at **Heracles** it is hard to believe that Peter Bosz will write another fairy tale by leading the Almelo club to sixth (or higher) again.

The main goal of **Willem II** – who were saved from bankruptcy after Tilburg council waived their debts on the stadium rent – **Roda JC**, **NEC Nijmegen**, **VVV**, **Den Haag**, **Vitesse** and promoted **De Graafschap** will be avoiding relegation.

Excelsior, Feyenoord's satellite club – who have the lowest budget, stadium capacity and fan base in the division – look doomed to finish bottom.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

PSV's lack of firepower could be solved by the return of Jonathan Reis, now clean after his cocaine addiction problem last season

Striking hope...Utrecht's Mulenga

Twente goal man...Janko takes in his new surroundings in Enschede

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/holland

POLAND EKSTRAKLASA 2010-11

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 6, 2010**
Winter break **December 4, 2010 to February 24, 2011**
Season ends **May 29, 2011**

POLISH clubs continue to recruit from overseas because it is cheaper than buying Polish-based players; clubs can then sell on players to other Polish clubs at a profit.

Joel Tshibamba, the Congo striker who joined Arka Gdynia in January, signed for champions **Lech Poznan** this summer as one of the replacements for Robert Lewandowski, who moved to Borussia Dortmund.

If Tshibamba can link well with Artur Wichniarek – the 33-year-old former Arminia Bielefeld and Hertha Berlin striker who is back at his former club – then Lech can be confident of defending their title.

However, it will be harder for Lech this season as there are three other sides with strong claims on the title.

Wisla, who lost the championship when they conceded an injury-time goal in the Krakow derby against Cracovia in the penultimate round of last season, are even more determined to claim the title this season. Coach Henryk Kasperczak made a sensational return in March, having failed in October 2009 with a court case against the club for unpaid wages. Over the summer he lost his whole defence – Pablo Alvarez (Reggina), Arkadiusz Glowacki (Trabzonspor), Mariusz Jop (Gornik Zabrze) and Marcelo (PSV Eindhoven) – but he has recruited two defenders, Slovakian Erik Cikos and Bosnian Gordan Bunoza, as well as midfielder Dragan Paljic from Kaiserslautern.

Most importantly for Krakow's fans is the return of former star Maciej Zurawski after five years with Celtic, Larissa and Omonia Nicosia.

Maciej Skorza, sacked as coach by Wisla in March, has joined **Legia**, who have changed almost the entire team after a hugely disappointing season.

Skorza has recruited a foreign army of new signings. The key roles should go to three new midfielders: Argentinian Alejandro Ariel Cabral from Velez Sarsfield, Portuguese Manu from Maritimo and Croatian Ivica Vrdoljak from Dinamo Zagreb. The latter was reported as the highest transfer to the Polish Ekstraklasa at £850,000.

Coup...Smolarek

For Jozef Wojciechowski, chairman of another Warsaw club, **Polonia**, the title is a serious target as they will celebrate their centenary next year. He has promised coach Jose Maria Bakero a bonus of £250,000 or 25 per cent of club shares if they win the championship. He also delivered a transfer coup by signing striker Ebi Smolarek from Kavala and he will be the best paid player in the Ekstraklasa on £335,00 per year.

Polonia are an exception in having recruited mostly Polish players, a few of them from **GKS Belchatow**, who are at a very low point.

Three years ago GKS finished as runners-up and were sponsored by a local coal mine and power station. But then the Polish parliament banned state companies from supporting sports clubs. Without a sponsor, GKS face a real struggle to survive this season despite the surprise signing of veteran striker Marcin Zewlakow from APOEL Nicosia.

Ruch Chorzow's third place was the biggest surprise of last term, but it will be very difficult for them to repeat that feat. **Jagiellonia Bialystok** were docked 10 points for a match-fixing scandal but still avoided relegation last season and won their first trophy, the Polish Cup. They should feature in the upper half of the table.

Arka Gdynia last season avoided relegation by a whisker. During the summer they lost their best player, Tshibamba, to Lech, but recruited a number of new foreigners, including Dutch defender Marciano Bruma.

Cracovia Krakow have a new sports director, Tomasz Rzasa, who should bring some stability to the club as they fight relegation.

Gornik Zabrze, the only Polish club to have appeared in a European Final (the 1970 Cup-winners Cup), are back in the top flight after only one season away following their shock relegation a year ago. With financial backing from insurance company Allianz, they will provide tough competition.

Korona Kielce are looking forward to their second season in the Ekstraklasa since relegation following a match-fixing scandal and they will be happy with a mid-table position.

Lechia Gdansk, who count prime minister Donald Tusk among their supporters, have ambitions to become a leading force in Polish football, but it will not be this season.

Polonia Bytom are one of the poorest clubs in the league but surprisingly finished eighth and seventh in the last two seasons. The "team without stars" can do the same again.

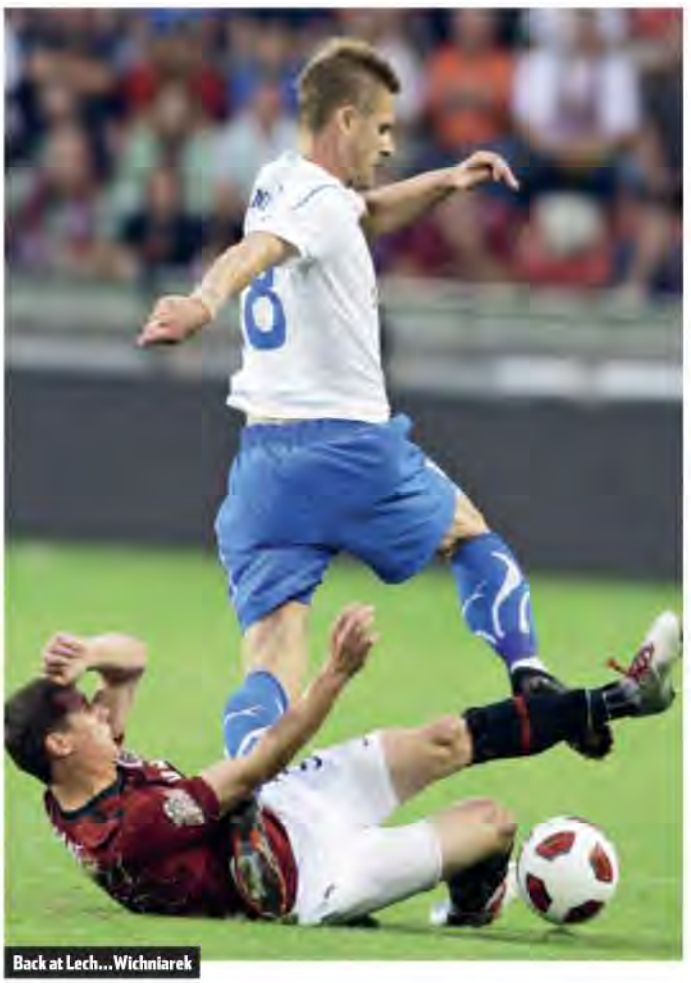
Slask Wroclaw, backed by TV magnate Zygmunt Solorz-Zak are planning to move to a new stadium, that is under construction for Euro 2012. They were surprise relegation battlers last season.

Widzew Lodz, last year's second division champions, are back after just one season away but in the summer they unexpectedly lost coach Pawel Janas, who joined Polonia Warsaw as vice-chairman.

Zaglebie Lubin lost coach Franciszek Smuda to the national team midway through last season but should not have any problems maintaining a mid-table position.

Dariusz Kurowski

The title will be a serious target for Polonia this season as they celebrate their centenary next year


Back at Lech...Wichniarek

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/poland

PORTUGAL LIGA 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 13, 2010**
Season ends **May 15, 2011**

AFTER a stellar season in which they won 24 of their 30 games en route to a 32nd league title, what can **Benfica** do for an encore? Well, according to coach Jorge Jesus they can do it all over again, with the 56-year-old confident that he can lead the Eagles of Lisbon to back-to-back titles for the first time since 1984.

Even though he lost star winger Angel Di Maria to Real Madrid, Jesus can still call upon last season's top scorer Oscar Cardozo and a solid defence that includes Fabio Coentrao, who had a fantastic World Cup and is the fans' new idol.

Meanwhile, supporters hope new signings Nico Gaitan and Franco Jara – who arrived from Argentinian sides Boca Juniors and Arsenal respectively – can live up to the standards set by compatriots Di Maria, Pablo Aimar and Javier Saviola and shine in Lisbon.

For the first time in five years, **Porto** aren't starting the season as defending champions. The northern club finished last season in third place, their lowest league position since 2002.

In order to shake things up, they have taken a risk in hiring a young, unproven coach in 32-year-old Andre Villas Boas, who is a protégé of Jose Mourinho, having worked with the "special one" at Chelsea and Inter. An impressive stint as Academica coach last season convinced the Dragons to hire him; now the fans' expectations are for Porto to reclaim their crown and play better football than they did last time out under veteran boss Jesualdo Ferreira.

However, Villas Boas will have to work without inspirational captain Bruno Alves who left for Zenit St Petersburg in the summer. He is likely to be replaced by former Under-21 star Sereno, who was signed from Valladolid. Porto's highest profile signing was Joao Moutinho, the international midfielder joining from Sporting for £9million after falling out with his first and only club. He will play alongside another highly-rated youngster, Colombia's James Rodriguez, who was bought from Banfield.

Hit man...Cardozo was the league's top scorer last season with 26 goals

Benfica coach Jorge Jesus is confident he can lead the Eagles of Lisbon to back-to-back titles for the first time since 1984

Lion heart...Sporting Lisbon newcomer Evaldo (left)

As far as **Sporting Lisbon** are concerned, losing their captain was a big blow to their aspirations this season. Moutinho was one of the most influential players in the side. But while his work-rate and skill will be missed, the transfer fee will help the club balance the books. Even though they have consistently sold their top players every season, Sporting are still struggling to stay in the black.

President Jose Eduardo Bettencourt runs a tight ship and does not want to incur a large debt, which is why signings have been few and far between. The Lions of Lisbon only spent £6.5m this summer, bringing in Chile international Jaime Valdes from Atalanta, Argentinian centre-back Marco Torsiglieri from Velez Sarsfield and Brazilian left-back Evaldo from Braga. This means new coach Paulo Sergio, who arrived from Guimaraes, will have to improve on last year's fourth-place finish with most of the players who were at the Alvalade Stadium last season.

Last season was the best in **Sporting Braga**'s history as they finished second, thanks to a rock solid defence which conceded only 20 goals in 30 games. Young coach Domingos Paciencia will struggle to repeat the feat, especially after he lost star goalkeeper Eduardo to Genoa. Hugo Viana, Evaldo and Olberdam have also gone, leaving Braga are a weaker side. Their European commitments will also stretch a small squad and they could struggle to finish in the top four this time around.

Looking at potential overachievers, **Vitoria Guimaraes** could punch above their weight. New coach Manuel Machado has a reputation for getting the best out of his players and after successful stints with Nacional and Braga he returns to the club he took to fifth place in 2005.

Maritimo proved last season they are hard to beat as they clinched a Europa League spot and they will once again count on a young and talented group of players, while Predrag Jokanovic has replaced Machado at **Nacional**, who will be looking to get back into the European places after missing out last season.

Naval have continued their policy of recruiting from France, new coach Victor Zvunka joining from Guingamp.

At financially troubled **Uniao Leiria**, Lito Vidigal has been replaced by young coach Pedro Caixinha, while the club insists it will stay at the Dr. Magalhaes Pessoa stadium, despite the mounting debts.

Braga hero...Paciencia

Other new coaches include Rui Vitoria at **Pacos Ferreira** and Jorge Costa at **Academica**. Costa helped **Olhanense** survive their first season back in the top flight for 34 years last time out, but they could struggle this season, as could **Vitoria Setubal** and **Rio Ave**, who sold defender Fabio Faria to Benfica.

The new clubs are **Portimonense**, in the top flight for the first time since 1990, and **Beira-Mar**. They replace Belenenses and Leixoes.

Pedro Pinto

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/portugal

ROMANIA LIGA 1 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 23, 2010**
Winter break **December 11, 2010 to February 18, 2011**
Season ends **May 21, 2011**

FIVE of Romania's top clubs changed coach over the summer. Victor Piturca returned to his former team Steaua, Ioan Andone is back at Dinamo after four years away, Vaslui hired Spaniard Juan Roman Lopez Caro, former Red Star Belgrade coach Vladimir Petrovic took over at

Mission...Piturca hopes to end Steaua drought

Timisoara, while Marius Sumudica is back at his former club Rapid Bucharest.

Meanwhile, champions **CFR Cluj** have retained Andrea Mandorlini and remain the team to beat. They proved their worth with victory in the pre-season Super Cup – their seventh major trophy in the past three years.

At **Steaua**, the days when owner Gigi Becali ordered team changes by telephone during matches are over. New coach Piturca, who was fired as national team boss after Romania failed to qualify for the 2006 World Cup, is now hopeful of ending a trophy drought that dates back to 2006. The club signed 12 new players over the summer and will be the main threat to CFR.

The global financial crisis has had a major impact on many clubs and most have lost the support of local councils – a legacy of the Communist era. More recently, many club owners have suffered losses in the property market.

Timisoara, almost £1million in debt, face a difficult campaign after the taxman froze the club's bank accounts.

Home from home...Universitatea Craiova's former stadium, Ion Oblemenco

Other clubs have resorted to more unorthodox methods to stay in the top division. **Pandurii**, who were relegated just two months ago, have returned to the top flight in record time under the leadership of Marin Condescu, boss of one of the country's leading miners' unions, who bought the place of International Curtea de Arges, for around £2.5million. The move was conditional on International's coach Ionut Badea and his players moving to the new club.

It was not the first time Pandurii have obtained a place in the top division by controversial means. In 2006, they took the place of Sportul Studentesc Bucharest, who had failed to obtain a professional licence. An FA investigation failed to uncover evidence, alleged at the time, that Sportul directors had been paid a substantial sum.

International Curtea de Arges' owner, Benone Lazar, has also had similar experiences in the past. In 2005, he sold his club's second division place to Astra Ploiesti, for around £80,000.

However, the Professional Soccer League gave a green light to Pandurii's purchase of International, commenting: "All papers are legal and Pandurii have been admitted to the first division."

Dinamo Bucharest coach Andone says his main task is to rebuild the team in his first year and to win the title in his second. Club president Cristian Borcea, standing trial for corruption, resigned after 11 years in the job.

Rapid Bucharest were busy in the transfer market, bringing in Mihai Roman from Brasov and Brazilian forward Cassio from Portuguese club Leiria. "Bookmakers say that we are seventh favourites for the title this year, but we want to make our supporters happy by proving them wrong," said new president Dinu Gheorghe.

CFR Cluj remain the team to beat after winning the pre-season Super Cup – their seventh major trophy in three years

Universitatea Craiova remain exiled in Turnu Severin, 100 km west of their Craiova home, after failing to agree a deal with Craiova city council, owners of Ion Oblemenco stadium in the city.

At **Unirea Urziceni**, Israeli coach Ronny Levy must work hard to strengthen the mental resolve of his players, who failed to convert four out of four penalties in the Super Cup loss to CFR.

Vaslui, under ambitious millionaire owner Adrian Porumboiu, have hired former Real Madrid coach Lopez Caro in a bid to win their first title.

Brasov again broke records for the wrong reasons, firing Italian coach Giuseppe Materrazzi after two days in the job, beating the previous record of Nicolo Napoli, who lasted one week at the start of the 2009-10 campaign.

Super Cup lose...Levy

There was no transfer activity at **Otelul Galati**, while **Gloria Bistrita** faced the dilemma of whether to sell Brazilian striker Aluisio Moraes, their best player, to secure the club's immediate financial future, or to hold onto him to help in their looming relegation battle.

Universitatea Cluj, the "Red Hats", have returned to the first division after years in the lower leagues and will revive a fierce rivalry with CFR.

Gaz Metan Medias are one of four top-division teams – along with Universitatea Cluj, Victoria Branesti and Universitatea Craiova – who are exiled in different cities for not having a proper stadium at home.

Astra Ploiesti will be strong candidates for relegation, but have hired former Steaua coach Mihai Stoichita.

Promoted **Victoria Branesti**, from a village of 8,000 inhabitants, will play in Buzau, 80km away.

Sportul Studentesc welcome back two of the best Romanians in the league in Dacian Varga and Tiberiu Balan, still dream of the 1980s when the "crazy gang" were title contenders.

Targu Mures, formerly Unirea Sinicolau Mare, will be competing in the top division for first time.

Radu Timofte

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/romania

SCOTLAND PREMIER LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 14, 2010**
Season ends **May 9, 2011**

NEIL LENNON of **Celtic** has been the league's busiest manager during the summer. South Korea full-back Cha Du-ri and Mexico midfielder Efrain Juarez, both of whom featured at South Africa 2010, should galvanise the team's right flank. Striker Daryl Murphy has also arrived from Sunderland, while versatile Wales midfielder Joe Ledley joins from Cardiff City. With Artur Boruc moving to Fiorentina, an experienced goalkeeper remains a priority, though attempts to lure England's David James north of the border proved unsuccessful.

Champions **Rangers** are odds-on to retain their title, but go into the new campaign looking somewhat depleted. Their main goalscorer Kris Boyd has joined the Old Firm exodus to Middlesbrough as a free agent, Kevin Thompson has also gone to Boro, while talented teenage defender Danny Wilson has been sold to Liverpool for a fee that could reach £5million. In all, six first-team squad members have left, but manager Walter Smith has been promised cash for three new signings.

Hearts boss Jim Jefferies knows he must deliver a considerable improvement on last season's scraped sixth place finish to ensure owner Vladimir Romanov maintains his current uncharacteristically laid-back stance. They will hope that in Kevin Kyle, recruited from Kilmarnock, they have finally found a regular goalscorer. Jefferies will also hope that his star asset, winger Andrew Driver – who was the subject of a £2.5m bid from Burnley – will stay put.

Mark McGhee has been rebuilding **Aberdeen** after parting company with eight first-team squad members. The loss of midfielder Charlie Mulgrew to Celtic leaves a big dent, while skipper Mark Kerr has moved to Greece. Determined not to be forced into any "expensive mistakes" in the transfer market, McGhee has spent the summer running the rule over a steady stream of triallists and keeper Mark Howard, former Cardiff City striker Josh Magennis and Rochdale defender Rory McArdle have agreed terms.

Cup holders **Dundee United** should once more be the team to give the Glasgow giants most trouble, especially if they resist interest in key players – notably midfield duo Morgaro Gomis and Prince Buaben. Reinforcements have come in the form of a pair of 20-year olds: Queens Park full-back Barry Douglas and Slovak keeper Filip Mentel from Manchester City, but manager Peter Houston will hope to add some extra experience to the squad.

Hoops coup...Mexico's World Cup midfielder Juarez has arrived at Celtic

An experienced goalkeeper remains a priority for Celtic after attempts to lure David James proved unsuccessful

Motherwell, rejuvenated since former Scotland boss Craig Brown took over in January, should improve on last season's eighth place. They have been bolstered by the arrival of Cypriot defender Angelis Charalambous from Anorthosis Famagusta but, with further transfer funds non-existent, Brown is resigned to losing his most saleable asset, defender Mark Reynolds, in order to generate the kitty he needs to bring in a much-needed centre-forward.

Key asset...Dundee United's Gomis (front)

New **Kilmarnock** manager Mixu Paatelainen has been handed what is thought to be the lowest budget in the league and faces an uphill struggle to avoid the drop. He has made experienced French midfielder Guillaume Beuzelin – who played under the Finn at Hibernian – the creative fulcrum. More funds may be made available if midfielder Craig Bryson is sold before the end of the summer.

Hibernian remain pleasing on the eye under John Hughes, though frustratingly inconsistent, but the potency of strikers Derek Riordan and Anthony Stokes was often undermined last season by shortcomings at the back. Full-back Michael Hart from Preston and centre-back David Stephens from Norwich will help shore up the defence, while NAC Breda's Edwin De Graaf should bring experience to the midfield.

New **St Mirren** manager Danny Lennon has raided former club Cowdenbeath – who he led to back-to-back promotions – for four new signings: defenders Darren McGregor and Peter Bradley, and forwards Paul McQuade and Gareth Wardlaw. The latter two will be tasked with filling the gap left by Billy Mehmet, the Buddies' top scorer for the last three seasons who has joined Turkish club Genclerbirligi.

Having finished a surprise seventh in their second Premier League campaign, **Hamilton Academicals** have proven their top-flight credentials. A further climb looks unlikely for now, especially as bigger clubs continue to circle their home-grown stars. The latest of these, midfielder James McArthur, has followed fellow Accies academy graduate James McCarthy to Wigan. More young prospects will be fast-tracked into the first team this term.

With eight players having left **St Johnstone** this summer, manager Derek McInnes has turned to the English lower leagues for replacements. The most notable is his former West Brom team-mate Scott Dobie, signed from Carlisle. Former Chelsea and Leeds centre-half Michael Duberry – an influential figure during his short spell at McDiarmid Park last season – has extended his stay for another year.

Strike duo...Hibs' Stokes (left) and Riordan

With little cash to spend, **Inverness Caledonian Thistle** manager Terry Butcher will rely largely on the squad that stormed to the first division title to ensure an instant return to the top flight. He has beefed up at the back with Northern Ireland goalkeeper Jonathan Tuffey from Partick Thistle and full-back Kevin McCann on loan from Hibs – and a wild card in 20-year-old Israeli forward Gil Blumanshtein from Hapoel Beersheba.

Dan Brennan

SERBIA SUPER LIGA 2010-2011

On the move?...Partizan midfielder Petrovic was a reported target for West Ham United

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 14, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

AS ever, the only serious candidates to win the league title will come from Belgrade.

Champions **Partizan** may have won the last three titles, but they appear weaker than last season at the moment. First-choice goalkeeper Mladen Bozovic has signed for Videoton of Hungary, right-back Srda Knezevic joined Legia Warsaw and left-back Marko Lomic moved to Dynamo Moscow, while the fans' favourite, striker Lamine Diarra, went on loan to UAE club Al Shabab. It also looks increasingly likely that promising central midfielder Radosav Petrovic – Partizan's only representative in Serbia's World Cup squad – will move abroad before the transfer window closes, possibly to England.

So far the gaps have been covered by the arrival of keeper Radisa Ilic from Borac Cacak, right-back Ivan Stevanovic on loan from Sochaux, Vojvodina left-back Joseph Kizito and the return of striker Milos Bogunovic from a loan spell at Cadiz.

According to transfer rumours, Partizan's other targets include their former captain Milan Smiljanic, who failed to make the grade in Spain at Espanyol, another Partizan old boy Ivica Ilijev and Vojvodina striker Dragan Mrdja, the league's top scorer with 22 goals last season.

There were even stories that Partizan were interested in signing right-winger Nikola Lazetic, Red Star's captain last season. Brazilian attacker Cleo made the same move a year ago with few protests, but in Lazetic's case a move across the city to their bitter rivals would likely cause uproar among Red Star fans.

Last season's runners-up, **Red Star** were celebrating before a ball had even been kicked this term following the signing of a five-year sponsorship deal with Russian company Gazpromneft, a division of Gazprom who own Zenit St Petersburg. The financial details have not been revealed, but according to reports the Russians will pay Red Star about £3million a year. Such an amount might not sound spectacular, but given the financial difficulties the club has faced in the past two years (debts stand at around £20 million), the agreement means another step towards stabilisation.

A few weeks before signing with Gazpromneft, Red Star announced an ambitious project: the complete renovation of their Marakana stadium, which was built in the mid-1960s. The plan foresees an almost completely new arena, with a capacity of 60,000, plus a hotel and shopping centre. The investor behind the £500m project is a Portuguese company, Sonae Sierra, who say it could be built within the next five years.

If captain Nikola Lazetic moved across the city to rivals Partizan it would likely cause uproar among the Red Star fans

As far as Red Star's squad is concerned, only one key player has left – striker Dejan Lekic joining Osasuna – but skipper Lazetic has refused to sign a new, reduced contract. Arrivals include former national team right-winger Ognjen Koroman, Werder Bremen left-back Dusko Tosic, former captain Dejan Milovanovic on loan from Lens and 19-year-old Montenegrin midfielder Marko Vesovic from Buducnost Podgorica. It is expected that another striker will be signed as a replacement for Lekic.

Vojvodina, under new coach Zoran Milinkovic (who finished fourth with promoted Spartak Subotica last season) and with a pretty much renovated team, hope to have a better campaign than last term, when they had title ambitions, only to finish fifth.

OFK and **Spartak** will be looking to replicate last season's European qualification, while **Jagodina** and **Rad** will hope to emulate those achievements.

Borac, who finished five points above the relegation zone could find themselves in another scrap at the bottom, along with promoted **Indija** and **Sevojno**.

Most of the other clubs in the top flight – in particular **Smederevo, Cukaricki, BSK, Metalac** and **Javor** – are in serious financial trouble, while **Hajduk Kula** are set to instigate bankruptcy proceedings.

There was some good news, however, with the Serbian government announcing that it will finance floodlights for 10 stadiums. At the moment, only the Red Star and Partizan stadiums are able to stage night matches.

Vladimir Novak

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/serbia

Wanted man...Red Star's Lazetic (left) tussles with Janko Tumbasevic of Vojvodina

SWITZERLAND SUPER LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 17, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

YOUNG BOYS' hopes of finally winning the title again suffered a setback before the start of the season with the sale of Seydou Doumbia to CSKA Moscow.

The Ivorian has been the outstanding player in the Swiss Super League for the last two seasons, finishing as top scorer on each occasion, with 30 goals last time out and 20 the year before that.

The sale is frustrating news for coach Vladimir Petkovic, whose team have finished runners-up in each of the last three seasons and who last won the championship back in 1986.

Last season Young Boys led the table for most of the campaign, only to be pipped on the last day by Basle.

Doumbia has been replaced with 19-year-old Emmanuel Mayuka, a highly promising Zambian striker. Raised at Kabwe Warriors, Mayuka was the youngest player at the 2008 African Nations Cup in Ghana, has already had two seasons in Israel with Maccabi Tel Aviv and, at £1.15million, was the most expensive purchase in the close season by a Swiss club.

The league has kept the same format as last year with 10 teams playing each other four times over the campaign.

While, Switzerland may be one of the world's richest countries, in many ways its top division resembles that of one of the bigger Latin American nations as the most promising local prospects move to bigger European teams in their teens.

A prime example of this is Nassim Ben Khalifa, a member of the Switzerland team that won the Under-17 World Cup in November and who left Grasshopper at the end of last season, his first as a professional, to join Wolfsburg in Germany. Meanwhile, players such as Mayuka and Doumbia tend to look on the Swiss League as a stepping stone between their own countries and the top European leagues.

Promising...Young Boys hope Mayuka can fill the goalscoring boots of Doumbia

The Swiss league resembles one of Latin nations where promising local prospects move to big European teams in their teens

Nor does the league always run with Swiss precision.

The run-up to this season was accompanied by rumblings of discontent from second division Lugano against the promotion of Thun to the top flight.

Last May, nine lower-division Swiss players were banned, including five indefinitely, in connection with match fixing. With three of those playing for Thun at the time of their misdemeanours, Lugano claimed that Thun should be stripped of their right to play in the top flight.

Hooliganism is also a problem and the country is well behind its neighbours in tackling the problem. Under the latest initiative, hooligans who are banned from football stadiums will also be stopped from going to ice hockey matches, and vice versa, as the same people often cause trouble at both sports.

On the other hand, nobody can accuse Swiss clubs of recklessly throwing money around, with Portuguese midfielder Jorge Teixeira's move from Maccabi Haifa to Zurich the only one, apart from Mayuka, to pass the £1m mark.

Even champions **Basle** have been unable to hold on to their top players, with midfielder Carlitos leaving to join Malaga and Antonio da Silva moving to Karlsruhe. Nevertheless, Thorsten Fink's team, who won the double last season, have a number of Swiss internationals, plus Australia's Scott Chipperfield and Ghana's Samuel Inkoom and are clear favourites to retain their title.

Apart from Young Boys, their main challenger is likely to be **Grasshopper**, who made a dismal start last season but then climbed steadily up the table to finish third. Grasshopper are still using Zurich's Letzigrund stadium after their Hardturm ground was demolished and plans for a new arena became bogged down in planning problems.

Zurich, champions two seasons ago, are an unknown quantity. Distracted by the Champions League last season, they ended up stuck in mid-table and replaced coach Bernard Challandes with Urs Fischer a few games from the end.

Challandes has decided to try his luck at **Sion**, the country's most volatile and unpredictable club, where more than 20 coaches have been employed since Christian Constantin became president in 2003 (the exact number depends on what you describe as "interim"). Challandes replaces Didier Tholot.

Sion, along with **Lucerne** and **Neuchatel Xamax**, are likely to be among the teams challenging for European places while **St Gallen, Bellinzona** and **Thun** are more likely to find themselves involved in the relegation scrap.

Derby clash...Grasshopper's Silas (left) crosses paths with Chaker Zouaghi of Zurich

Newly-promoted Thun will hope to avoid the mistakes they made last time in the top flight. They actually got as far as the Champions League group stage in 2005, but they squandered the money, broke up the team and the club spirit and ended up back in the second division.

Brian Homewood

Optimistic...Basle's David Abraham (left) and Cagdas Atan hope they have plenty to celebrate

For fixtures got to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/switzerland

TURKEY SUPER LIG 2010-2011

Star signing...Guti has joined Besiktas from Real Madrid

KEY DATES

Season starts August 15, 2010
Winter break December 20, 2010 to January 22, 2011
Season ends May 22, 2011

THE title race may have had a dramatic finish last season, but there has been a very quiet build-up to the new campaign. With the exception of Besiktas, the "big four" clubs have signed young, up-and-coming players rather than spending millions on famous names as they have over the past decade.

Even **Fenerbahce**, the country's richest club, have not dug very deep in their pockets. With only French striker Issiar Dia (Nancy) and Slovak winger Miroslav Stoch (Chelsea) signed from overseas, the Canaries have changed their transfer policy and new coach Aykut Kocaman says he is after hungry young players. Their last important signing was 22-year-old wing-back Caner Erkin from Galatasaray, which took the cost of their summer signings to £10million.

Galatasaray were happy to replace Valencia-bound midfielder Mehmet Topal with Albania international Lorik Cana at a cost of around £4m from Sunderland. Their other foreign signing was Colombia winger Juan Pablo Pino from Monaco for around £2.5m. Promising youngsters Mehmet Batdal from Bucaspor and Ali Turan from Kayserispor will both strengthen the bench.

This year's big spenders were without a doubt **Besiktas**. Not only do they have a new coach in Bernd Schuster, they have also signed such stars as Portugal's Ricardo Quaresma and Spain's Guti. The target for Besiktas president Yildirim Demiroren is a repeat of the double they did two years ago.

Trabzonspor, last season's Turkish Cup winners, have been very quiet, with 32-year-old Polish defender Arkadiusz Glowacki from Wisla Krakow their only buy of note. They desperately need a striker but the cash is not there.

Ertugrul Saglam, who coached **Bursaspor** to last season's championship, believes he can repeat that success with the addition of just three or four new signings. President Ibrahim Yazici backed his coach by signing two Argentinians, Frederico Insua and Damian Steinert.

For everybody else it has been a question of trying their luck with young players and free transfers.

Teams that played positive football last season, such as **Kayserispor, Genclerbirligi, Istanbul BB, Antalyaspor** and **Gaziantepspor** can be expected to be tough to beat even without major reinforcements.

Meanwhile, second tier champions **Karabukspor**, along with promoted **Bucaspor** and **Konyaspor**, are expected to contest the relegation places with **Ankaragucu, Eskisehirspor, Kasimpasa, Manisaspor** and **Sivasspor**.

Mehmet Demircan

Last season's champions Bursaspor believe they can repeat that success with three or four additions to their squad

Same again...Ertugrul Saglam

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/turkey

UKRAINE PREMIER LEAGUE 2010-2011

In charge...Collina has joined the country's football federation to oversee refereeing matters

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 9, 2010**
Winter break **November 27, 2010 to March 3, 2011**
Season ends **May 20, 2011**

THE biggest event in Ukrainian football's pre-season was not the transfer of a player or coach, but the appointment of ex-referee Pierluigi Collina to oversee all refereeing matters at the Football Federation of Ukraine.

It is hoped that the arrival of the Italian will put an end to accusations that officials have been manipulated by the federation, whose president Hryhoriy Surkis has close links to Dynamo Kyiv.

Homecoming...Chygrynskiy

The favourites this season are once again reigning champions **Shakhtar**. The club from Donetsk finally parted company with unsettled Mexico striker Nery Castillo, while Brazilian right-winger Ilsinho simply returned home, claiming non-payment of his salary. Coach Mircea Lucescu brought back international defender Dmytro Chygrynskiy from Barcelona for £12.5million and signed promising defender Serhiy Kryvtsov and midfielder Taras Stepanenko, both from Metalurh Zaporizhzhya. They also signed Croatia striker Eduardo from Premier League side Arsenal.

Veteran **Dynamo** star Andriy Shevchenko will wear the captain's armband and is desperate to lead his side to the title. To this end, Valeriy Gazzayev, the Kiev club's Russian coach, has re-signed goalkeeper Denys Boyko from Obolon and picked up Macedonia defender Goran Popov from Holland's Heerenveen. He also added variety in attack by bringing in 19-year old Brazilian Andre from Santos, but Dynamo's biggest signing was 20-year old Argentinian attacking midfielder Facundo Bertoglio from Colon for £3.5m.

The head coach of **Metalist**, Myron Markevych, who combines his job with the post of national team manager, believes this season is the right time to throw down a challenge to Shakhtar and Dynamo, saying: "We are no longer the so-called third power. Our aim this season is at least to be sandwiched between the top two in the league and play Champions League football next term."

The Polecats spent heavily in the summer, acquiring 24-year old Argentina defender Cristian Villagra from River Plate and creative 27-year-old Brazilian midfielder Cleiton Xavier from Palmeiras for £3.5m. They also signed two former Ukraine internationals in Oleksandr Romanchuk from Dynamo and Andriy Vorobey from Arsenal Kyiv.

Dnipro signed Ukraine Under-21 goalkeeper Anton Kanibolotskyi from Kryvbas. "We signed the players we wanted last winter and are very well equipped to lay claim to the league title," explained coach Volodymyr Bezsonov.

Skipper...Shevchenko

National coach Myron Markevych believes the time is right for Metalist to throw down a challenge to Shakhtar and Dynamo

It's a similar situation at **Metalurh Donetsk**, who spent lavishly in two previous transfer windows. They boast one of the most experienced squads in the league and will be one of the main contenders for the Europa League place. This summer, Bulgarian coach Nikolay Kostov added only 26-year old Brazilian winger Ze Soares from Levski Sofia.

Karpaty from Lviv will have to work hard to retain their place among the top six as competing in the Europa League may prove a distraction. With that in mind, they signed goalkeeper Vitaliy Rudenko from Chornomorets, twins Hryhoriy and Borys Baranets from second-tier side FC Lviv, and Brazilians Neno and Danilo Avelar from Rio Claro.

The pre-season preparations of **Arsenal Kyiv** were marred by the suicide of their assistant coach Vasyl Yevseyev, a star for Dynamo Kyiv in the mid-1980s. Much will now depend on another ex-Dynamo player, the Uzbekistan international Maxim Shatskikh, whose goals will be crucial if they are to finish among the top six.

The revelation of last season, **Tavriya**, have enough resources to finish in the top half of the league table. They were relatively quiet this summer, signing experienced goalkeeper Vitaliy Postranskyi from Metalurh Zaporizhzhya and midfielder Anton Mukhovykov from second division Stal Alchevsk.

Kryvbas, who survived in the elite division only on the final day of the season, may not struggle as much this term after luring Lithuanian defender Linas Klimavicus and Georgia attacker Beka Gotsiridze from Dnipro, plus European Under-19 winner Kyrylo Petrov on loan from Dynamo.

Vorskla should keep their place in mid-table even after the loss of influential Albania defender Debatik Curri to Genclerbirligi of Turkey. His replacement is Yevhen Selin, on loan from Metalist.

Metalurh Zaporizhzhya have one of the best football academies, which allows them to find replacements for players sold to the bigger clubs, while **Illichivets** and **Zorya** have good ties with Shakhtar, giving them the chance to take players on loan from their wealthier neighbour.

Named after their brewery owners, **Obolon** are financially secure but face a battle against relegation, as do promoted **Volyn** – who will look to former Dynamo defender Vladyslav Vaschuk and the development of numerous cheap African imports – and **Sevastopol**, who may pay the price for their inexperience in their debut season in the top flight.

Oleg Zadernovsky

For fixtures got to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/ukraine

WALES PREMIER LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 13, 2010**
Season ends **April 30, 2011**

IT could be make or break for the Welsh Premier League this season, with the 12-club format in operation for the first time in an effort to raise the league's profile, boost attendances and improve the quality of the domestic game.

Teams will play each other twice in the first phase of the season, until mid-January, when the top six and bottom six will separate into championship and relegation conferences. As an added incentive, the Europa League spot normally awarded to the third-placed club will now go to the winners of a play-off system incorporating the clubs finishing third to sixth in the championship conference and the winners of the relegation conference.

The New Saints will be favourites to retain their title, being the only fully professional club in the league. A blend of highly experienced players, including former Wales centre-back Steve Evans, and young talent nurtured through their academy scholarship system will ensure continuity. Head coach Andy Cale has now handed the reins over to his assistant Mike Davies, whose first signing was prolific scorer Matty Williams from Rhyl.

Budget cuts at **Llanelli** mean player-manager Andy Legg will have to rely on the Reds' impressive youth set-up a lot more this term, though he has made some significant signings in defender Kris Thomas and former Wales striker Chris Llewelyn from Carmarthen Town and Neath respectively. Five-times golden boot-winner Rhys Griffiths has extended his stay and will be prominent in Llanelli's attempt to regain the title they last won in 2008.

Port Talbot Town were unlucky to come up against in-season TPS Turku of Finland in their first foray into Europe but they will have gained from the experience in the Europa League. Last season's Welsh Cup runners-up will be looking to challenge for silverware under the guidance of manager Mark Jones.

West-coast club **Aberystwyth Town**, who narrowly missed out on a Europa League place on the last day of last season, will hope to challenge again. They will, however, need to find a replacement for striker Luke Bowen, who scored 17 goals last season and has moved to Port Talbot.

Having won the Welsh Cup for the last three seasons, **Bangor City** manager Nev Powell is now turning his attentions to the league. A difficult side to beat, they are a danger going forward – especially with a striker of the calibre of Jamie Reed, who has been playing in Australia for Dandenong Thunder over the summer, alongside Aberystwyth pair Geoff Kellaway and Luke Sherbon.

Craig Harrison has built a strong squad at **Airbus UK Broughton** and after securing a top-12 berth last season will be looking to build some consistency in the hunt for honours. The league's all-time top scorer Marc Lloyd-Williams left in the close season and Harrison will be looking to Jake Cassidy, signed from third-level Llandudno Junction, to provide the goals.

Neath made the biggest headlines during the close season with their signing of former Rhyl, Wrexham, Swansea City and Bristol City striker Lee Trundle, who turned down approaches from English League One clubs Yeovil Town, Tranmere Rovers and Swindon Town to fly with the Eagles next season. Manager Andy Dyer also captured the signature of Kristian O'Leary from Swansea.

The Europa League spot, normally awarded to the third-placed club, will now go to the winners of a play-off

Bala Town begin their second season in the top flight having signed former Wales Under-21 midfielder Danny Thomas. Colin Caton's side are not expected to challenge for honours and will be happy to concentrate on consolidating their status.

Experienced manager Tomi Morgan took charge at **Carmarthen Town** in the close season, but he has lost former Wales Under-19 midfielder Danny Thomas to Haverfordwest County and will need to strengthen the Old Gold if they are to challenge for honours.

As well as signing Thomas, **Haverfordwest County** have further strengthened their young squad with Derek Brazil and also brought in Neil Thomas from Port Talbot and Richard Evans from Bath City to add experience to a mainly home-grown side.

Darren Ryan's **Newtown** squad has been rebuilt over the summer, with the Robins only securing a Premier berth when high-flyers Rhyl failed to obtain their licence. Ricky Evans joined from Bala Town, while defenders Paul Keddle and Lee Hartshorn, and midfielder Matthew Driscoll all arrived from Merthyr Tydfil, who went into liquidation in May.

Despite being one of the few remaining founder members still in the league and with arguably the best stadium, Newtown have underachieved for the last few seasons.

Prestatyn Town reached the semi-final of the Welsh Cup last season in only their second term at the top level. With midfielder Ross Stephens joining from Newtown and Lee Hunt from Bangor, they may make the top six at the end of the first phase.

Mel Thomas

Hearing the call...former Swansea City star Trundle is a headline capture for Neath

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/wales

ALBANIA SUPERLIGA 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 20, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

REIGNING champions **Dinamo Tirana** start as favourites to win this year's title. The club have retained most of last season's squad but added a new coach, Argentinian Luis Manuel Blanko, and two Albanian internationals, goalkeeper Isli Hidi, who is back home after a number of years in Ukraine, and midfielder Gjergji Muzaka from FK Tirana.

The main challengers are likely to be **Skenderbeu**, who only just managed to survive in the top flight last season. They have added a host of new players thanks to the financial backing of new president Agim Zeqo. Shkelqim Muca, the coach who led Dinamo last season has been hired, as well as a block of players from Besa, Albanian Cup-winners and runners-up in the league. They include goalkeeper Orges Shehi, defenders Endri Vrapi, Alban Dragusha and Ervin Fagu, and midfield organiser Blendi Shkembi.

Flamurtari have big ambitions after adding midfielder Bledar Devolli from FK Tirana and Daniel Xhafaj, last season's top league scorer, from Besa.

Shkumbini are confident of success after hiring experienced coach Mirel Josa as well as veteran goalkeeper Elvis Kotorri, who has won three titles in the last five years.

FK Tirana are in crisis after losing many of their best players. Even worse, coach Sulejman Starova, in the wake of a 4-0 defeat by Utrecht in the Europa League, accused some of his players of colluding with betting companies.

Besa are unlikely to repeat the successes of last season after so many departures. Their best hope is talented youngster Sokol Sikalleshi.

Vllaznia start the season weakened by the departure of last season's revelation, 19-year-old Bekim Bala, who has signed for Turkish side Genclerbirligi.

Teuta, despite their traditions, will rely on unearthing young talent and are unlikely to challenge for the title. **Laci**, last year's surprise package, lack financial support, prompting many of their best players to leave.

Kastrioti are a modest team who have had to start the championship with a completely new group of players and they are also expected to struggle.

The two promoted teams are **Bylis** and **Elbasani**. All eyes will be on Elbasani president Arben Laze following his release from prison after serving a two-year sentence for drugs trafficking. Some years ago, under his management, Elbasani won the championship and the club's fans are confident again.

Gezim Nushi

All eyes will be on Elbasani president Arben Laze following his release from prison after two years for drug trafficking

Doubts...FK Tirana (in stripes) lost heavily to Utrecht in this season's Europa League

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/albania

GEORGIA UMAGLESI LIGA 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 13, 2010**
Season ends **May 21, 2011**

GEORGIAN football is expected to undergo radical reform this season with the ending of state subsidies to clubs. The government is keen to open the door to private investors and cites the example of champions **Olimpi Rustavi** as how to raise standards within the league.

Olimpi are one of four clubs to be backed by private capital and have been lavishly sponsored by Georgian Steel since they were formed in 2006 by the merger of FC Rustavi and FC Tbilisi

This summer, the Steelers reinforced their position despite the departure of influential Brazilian defender Alex Fraga and his compatriot forward Anderson Aquino (both to Atletico Paranaense. In their places come experienced Estonian international defender Urmas Rooba and powerful Brazilian attacker Cahe. Olimpi also signed Georgia defender Aleksandr Kvakhadze from WIT, Montenegrin Igor Kuc from Mornar and Albanian striker Romeo Hamzaj from Bylis.

Olimpi's main rivals **Dinamo Tbilisi** have been quiet in the transfer market this summer, but coach Kakhaber Kacharava is unconcerned as they have managed to retain their best players: Portuguese defensive midfielder Ednilson, Brazilian attacking ace Robertinho and Cameroonian striker Donald Djousse.

Zestaponi are on a sound financial footing thanks to their sponsorship by Ferro-Alloy and they have cemented their defence by signing former Dynamo Kyiv defender Kakhaber Aladashvili and forward Gogi Pipia from Baia Zugdidi.

WIT Georgia, the current Georgian Cup holders, continue to rely heavily on graduates of their famed academy. The Veterinaries have targeted a top-four finish after retaining their brightest talents, Georgia internationals Luka Razmadze, Jaba Lipartia and Irakli Klimiashvili, but they will miss Kvakhadze who has joined Olimpi.

Sioni have signed a sponsorship deal with GNKAR Oil and can now think about finishing higher than their normal mid-table positions, while **Spartaki Tskhinvali** have been nicknamed the Highlanders after they moved from the breakaway region of Tskhinvali to the mountain town of Gori. Their mid-table position should be secure after persuading 31-year old Revaz Kemoklidze, one of the best Georgian defenders of his generation, to stay with the club.

Baia Zugdidi have an old squad and have failed to find a replacement for their most promising player, Zambian attacking midfielder Chisamba Lungu, who joined Russia's Ural.

Samtredia are expected to fight relegation, along with promoted teams **Kolkheti Poti** and **Torpedo 2008 Kutaisi**. Torpedo could receive a financial boost after they were purchased by a new owner, Vissol, for a token one Georgian Lari (45p).

Oleg Zadernovsky

On the move...Kvakhadze (right) has joined Olimpi

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer/fixtures/georgia

HUNGARY NBI 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 30, 2010**
Winter break **December 4, 2010 to February 24, 2011**
Season ends **May 27, 2011**

AS the new league kicked off amid a heatwave, few could see further than current incumbents Debrecen for the title, though Videoton, Gyor and Ujpest, perhaps Zalaegerszeg, must be considered top-three material.

Debrecen should be too strong, despite the departure of goalscorer Gergely Rudolf to Genoa. Young international attacking midfielder Balazs Farkas arrives from Dynamo Kyiv, while former Ujpest striker Peter Kabat will provide experience, if not youth.

Under Gyorgy Mezey – Hungary's coach back in 1986 – nearest challengers **Videoton** will go close if they can keep the Balkan pairing of Goran Vujovic from Montenegro and Nemanja Nikolic from Serbia up front.

Under Attila Pinter, **Gyor** are in with a shout too, but look like losing Estonia midfielder Tarmo Kink to the Bundesliga.

Zalaegerszeg are always a tricky proposition under Janos Csank. Summer signings have been limited to Zsolt Barna on loan from MTK and Gellert Ivancic from relegated DVTK, but they should finish in the top five despite the likely departure of striker Artjoms Rudnevs.

Ujpest are the strongest side from the capital with a shot at the title, not least thanks to the return of striker Tibor Tisza from Antwerp, though financial problems will invariably hinder their campaign.

Ferencvaros have a new-look team and leading the line will be Marek Heinz, the Czech international who turned down offers from America to stay closer to his native Moravia. Meanwhile, 10 of last year's first-team squad have departed, leaving gaps that need filling urgently – particularly where a goalkeeper is concerned.

MTK, a very young, mainly Hungarian side under old fox Jozsef Garami might cause an upset and improve on last season's sixth-place finish.

Haladas have made few changes but the prolific Krisztian Kenesei should ward off the risk of relegation, while **Honved** have an influx of unknown South Americans and Africans who should make for an interesting season.

At **Kecskemet**, the arrival of the prolific Attila Tokoli from Paks and Foxi Kethevoama from Ujpest should guarantee goals. Cash-strapped **Vasas** are pinning their hopes on Istvan Ferenczi, who arrives from Ferencvaros.

The decision of former international keeper Lajos Szucs to stay at **Papa** might not be enough to save them from relegation while the only target of **Kaposvar** is to stay in the top flight.

Much will depend on the form of midfielder Krisztian Lisztes if **Paks** are to overcome the loss of striker Attila Tokoli. **Siofok**, last year's NBII (West) champions have seven new players, but new signings may not be enough to stop **Szolnok** from sliding back down.

Peterjon Cresswell

For fixtures go to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/hungary

Back home...international striker Tisza has returned to Ujpest

MACEDONIA FIRST LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 31, 2010**
Winter break **December 12, 2010 to March 4, 2011**
Season ends **May 2011**

WHILE the national stadium, the Phillip II Arena, is being rebuilt and should be finished by the end of the year, elsewhere Macedonian football is falling apart.

Last season, the league started with 12 teams but finished with nine. Makedonija and Sloga were disqualified and relegated as punishment for boycotting matches in a dispute with the federation, while, with three rounds to go, UEFA asked for Pobeda to be excluded from the championship after a widely reported match-fixing scandal.

So, without three disqualified ex-champions, and with the country's best-supported team Vardar in transition, the best three teams from last season, Renova, Rabotnicki and Metalurg, start as favourites this time.

Champions **Renova** could not agree a deal to keep coach Vlatko Kostov, who is also assistant to national coach Mirsad Jonuz. Ex-Sloga coach Nexhat Shabani has replaced him, while Burhan Emrulahu was the highest profile new arrival.

Nigerian striker Adewale Sunday Amusan heads the list of foreigners who joined **Rabotnicki**. Gjorgji Mojsov returns from Hungary's Gyor but Rabotnicki will miss Serbian defender Radenko Bojovic, who moved to China and joined Pudong Zobon. Bobi Bozinovski, the league top scorer last season, has left the "Romantics" to join Lokomotiv in Kazakhstan.

Metalurg have completely overhauled their team, with 10 departures, including forward Blaze Ilijoski who joins South Korea's Gangwon.

Coach Zikica Tasevski has brought in midfielder Ertan Demiri from Lokeren as well as Marko Simonovski, Milan Ilievski and Vasko Mitrev from Vardar. Metalurg should be particularly strong in midfield.

Dragi Setinov and Erol Demir are the new owners of **Vardar**, the country's most successful club. The club's debts forced the departure of many players last season, but new coach Gjorgji Todorovski has signed a number of newcomers, including Brazilian Jesus Aguinaldo Braga and Veljan Cvetanovski, a Brazilian-born Macedonian who is nicknamed Kaka.

Horizont Turnovo lost Dragan Georgiev, who joined Germany's Mainz, but should stay in mid-table, along with **Teteks and Sileks**.

The two bottom-placed teams will be relegated, while those in ninth and 10th will play off against the third and fourth-placed teams from the second division.

Pelister, who were close to the Europa League qualifiers last season, will be lucky to escape relegation after losing almost the entire team and being left with youngsters on amateur contracts.

The candidates for relegation include the four promoted teams **Skendija**, **Skopje**, **Napredok** and **Bregalnica Stip**.

Michel Stojmanovski

For fixtures go to www.worldsoccer/fixtures/macedonia

Macedonian football is falling apart...last season the league started with 12 teams but finished with nine

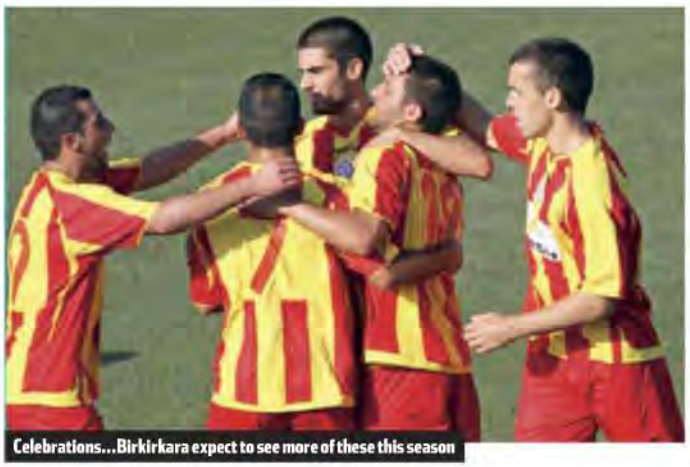
Euro clash...Rabotnicki (red) took on Liverpool

MALTA PREMIER LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

CHAMPIONS **Birkirkara** look set to continue where they left off at the end of last season. Having been boosted by positive results in the early rounds of the Champions League, where they became the first Maltese club to record three consecutive Champions League wins in a row, against FC Santa Coloma of Andorra and Zilina from Slovakia.


Celebrations...Birkirkara expect to see more of these this season

Confident...Zammit

"I am very pleased with the squad," says coach Paul Zammit. "Let me just remind everyone that at this time of the year last season no one gave Birkirkara a chance to win the title."

Brazilian goalkeeper Ezequiel Lovizon has arrived in place of Spaniard Jorge Mora, while Dutch striker Sylvano Comvalius has also left to seek new pastures abroad. An important addition is Andrew De Cesare, who arrived on a three-year deal from Tarxien Rainbows.

Their main rivals for the title will be **Valletta**. Former stalwart Jesmond Zerafa replaced Dutchman Ton Caanen as coach, with Malta international defender Jonathan Caruana arriving from Hibernians, Brazilian defender Lucas Ramon dos Santos signed from Qormi, and Brazilian striker Denni Rocha dos Santos from Tarxien Rainbows. Nigerian Omomighe Temile completed the list of new signings, while striker Ian Zammit is back after being on loan at Hamrun Spartans last term.

Sliema Wanderers have confirmed Mark Marlow as head coach, while **Qormi**, who finished joint third with Wanderers last season, and were beaten Maltese Cup finalists, have appointed Stephen Azzopardi.

The Premier Division welcomes back into the fold Division One champions **Marsaxlokk** and **Vittoriosa Stars**, while rivals **Tarxien Rainbows** and **Hibernians**, together with **Floriana** and **Hamrun Spartans** will all be hoping to avoid relegation.

Domenic Aquilina

For fixtures got to **www.worldsoccer/fixtures/malta**

This season Birkirkara have become the first Maltese club to record three consecutive Champions League wins

MONTENEGRO FIRST LEAGUE 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 14, 2010**
Winter break **December 5, 2010 to February 25, 2011**
Season ends **May 2011**

THE only thing that seems certain this season is that Montenegro won't have another new champion. In the first four seasons of Europe's youngest league, four different clubs – Zeta, Buducnost, Mogren and Rudar – managed to win the title, but Buducnost and title-holders Rudar Pljevlja look hot favourites for the league this term .

Buducnost, with new coach Nikola Rakojevic, have revived their squad by signing professional contracts with no less than 11 players from their youth ranks. They have also picked up experienced players like central defender Djordjije Djikanovic (Sutjeska) and midfielder Luka Tiodorovic (Mogren), as well as 19-year-old attacking midfielder Amar Nuhodzic (Decic).

Some first-teamers have left – Miroslav Vujadinovic, Nikola Vukcevic, Ivan Delic and Milan Djurisic – but the new squad should be strong enough to fight for the title, especially if the club can hold on to top striker Fatos Beciraj.

However, Buducnost need to resolve a problem with their fans, who have boycotted matches since last spring. Unhappy with the management style of chairman Tomislav Celebic and a lack of trophies, the supporters group *Varvari* (the Barbarians) have stayed away from home games. They have also been in trouble at away matches, throwing flares and bottles on the pitch.

Champions **Rudar**, with an unchanged team, will again be in contention for the title. Meanwhile, **Mogren** and **Zeta** will aim for a place in Europa League qualifiers.

High hopes...Buducnost's Djikanovic (no2) and Nenad Brnovic

The remaining clubs – **Grbalj, Lovcen, Sutjeska, Petrovac, Mornar** and **Decic** – will probably be content just to retain top flight status, as will the promoted teams **Mladost** and **Bar**.

Vladimir Novak

For fixtures got to **www.worldsoccer/fixtures/montenegro**

Four different teams won the title in the first four years of the championship – it's unlikely to be five in five this season

N IRELAND PREMIERSHIP 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **August 7, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

DAVID JEFFREY, the manager of **Linfield**, reckons his club took a giant step towards retaining the title they won last year – and their 50th League championship in the club's 125-year history – when striker Peter Thompson signed a three-year contract.

"Pistol Pete" – on loan from Stockport County for the second half of last season – was a vital catalyst in Linfield regaining the title. Midfield playmaker Jamie Mulgrew is also an important factor in making the Belfast Blues odds-on favourites.

Money – or rather the lack of it – will play a big part in **Cliftonville** manager Eddie Patterson's plans as he aims to emulate last season's runners-up spot.

Those finances could be given a boost if teenage striker Liam Boyce secures a move "across the water" to full-time football. Already recruited is former Newry City forward Stephen Garrett.

Also likely to play vital roles next season are veteran striker and club captain Chris Scannell and goalscoring midfielder George McMullan.

Looking ahead...Jeffrey

Financial problems also loom large for **Glentoran**. The East Belfast club released a number of players, including international winger Keith Gillespie and forward Michael Halliday, who had been 11 years at the club, at the end of what was a very disappointing campaign last term.

A poor second half to last season put paid to a higher place than fourth for **Crusaders**, and manager Stephen Baxter moved quickly at the end of the campaign to release several squad members, including midfielder Michael Collins and forward Mark Dickson. Baxter signed up Halliday on his release from Glentoran, along with talented winger Stuart Dallas from Coagh United.

Dungannon Swifts were the great unpredictables last season. Manager Dixie Robinson has added experienced central midfielder Jonny Topley from Portadown and young creative midfielder Niall Henderson, who was with Newry City last term.

Long-serving **Portadown** manager Ronnie McFall is looking to build on the success of last season when they qualified for Europe. But money is also in short supply and several players have been released, while ex-Derry City defender Darren Kelly has arrived.

Coleraine had a bitterly disappointing season last year, failing to make the top six after looking like possible title contenders in the autumn.

The loss of prolific scorer Rory Patterson – now with Plymouth Argyle – is surely a major blow.

Glenavon manager Marty Quinn's team failed to build on a good start to last season's campaign and ended up third from bottom. That resulted in a large clear-out at the end of the season.

Promoted **Donegal Celtic** will probably battle it out for survival with **Ballymena United**, **Lisburn Distillery** and **Newry City**, who were all in the relegation group at the end of last season.

Roy Kitson

For fixtures got to **www.worldsoccer/fixtures/northernireland**

SLOVENIA PRVA LIGA 2010-2011

KEY DATES

Season starts **July 16, 2010**
Season ends **May 2011**

AFTER a credible performance by the national team at the World Cup comes the harsh reality of the domestic league, where quality is lacking.

Of the 23 players who featured in South Africa, only two play in the Slovenian league: Elvedin Dzinic and Suad Filekovic of Maribor.

Miran Pavlin was Koper's best player last season but he quit after a 5-1 defeat to Dinamo Zagreb in the Champions League

Champions **Koper** are keen to defend the title but will have to do so without their captain Miran Pavlin.

The 38-year-old former international was the best player in the league last season but decided to quit after a 5-1 defeat to Dinamo Zagreb in the first leg of the Champions League second qualifying round.

Maribor, who reinforced with two attackers from relegated Interblock, Robert Baric and Josip Ilicic, look best placed to challenge Koper.

The other fancied team will be **Olimpija** from Ljubljana. They are now backed by Izet Rastoder, nicknamed "banana king" because he's made his money as a fruit trader. However they started badly, with elimination from the Europa league by Bosnia's Siroki Brijeg.

Domzale coach Darko Birjukov is hoping that the arrival of Buenos Aires-born striker Lucas Horvat from relegated Interblock can help improve on last season's flirt with relegation.

Celje, ever-present since the first independent league in 1991 but with only one second-place finish to show for it, have made few significant changes to challenge Koper or Maribor.

If **Gorica** are to improve on their third-place finish last time out, much depends on a younger striker being able to match up to the ageing Milan Osterc, top league striker with 23 goals last year.

Rudar Velenje, a modest club with modest ambitions and a 2,500-capacity stadium, look prime relegation candidates already.

Nafta Lendava, Slovenia's oldest club with a near all-Slovene squad, are probably looking at the same mid-table finish as last season.

The arrival of stalwart ex-internationals Jalen Pokorn and Janez Zavri may not prevent **Triglav Kranj**, last season's runners-up in the lower flight, from dropping back down straight away.

The return of ex-international midfielder Almir Tanjic after six years in Cyprus may just keep last season's second-tier champions **Primorje** afloat.

Zdravko Reic & Peterjon Cresswell

For fixtures got to **www.worldsoccer/fixtures/slovenia**

Gone...Pavlin

Battling back...FC Santa Coloma (in white) lost the return 4-3 in Malta

ANDORRA

Pitch problems

FC Santa Coloma were penalised with a 3-0 home defeat and given a €10,000 fine, suspended for two years, after their UEFA Champions League qualifier against Birkirkara of Malta was postponed because of an unplayable pitch at the Estadi Comunal d'Aixovall.

The Maltese champions made it through to the second qualifying round for the first time in their history, winning 7-3 on aggregate.

MONTENEGRO

Rudar score first goal of the new campaign

Nermin Useni scored the opening goal of this season's Champions League, putting Rudar Pljevlja ahead after 31 minutes of their first qualifying round, first leg tie away to Tre Fiori of San Marino.

Nedeljko Vlahovic and Ivica Jovanovic were also on target for the Montenegrin title-holders in a comprehensive 3-0 victory. Rudar triumphed 7-1 on aggregate.

SPAIN

Mallorca pay the price

Villarreal have been awarded Mallorca's place in the Europa

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - June 29/30; 2nd legs - July 6/7
FC Santa Coloma (And) v Birkirkara (Mlt)
0-3*, 3-4 (agg 3-7)
Tre Fiori (SaM) v Rudar Pljevlja (Mne)
0-3, 1-4 (agg 1-7)

**1st leg awarded 3-0 to Birkirkara because FC Santa Coloma's home pitch was deemed unsuitable to stage the game*

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 13/14; 2nd legs - July 20/21
AIK Stockholm (Swe) v Jeunesse d'Esch (Lux)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Aktobe (Kaz) v Olimpi Rustavi (Geo)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
BATE Borisov (Bls) v FH Hafnarfjordur (Ice)
5-1, 1-0 (agg 6-1)
Birkirkara v Zilina (Slk)
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)
Bohemians (Rlr) v The New Saints (Wal)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)
Dinamo Zagreb (Cro) v Koper (Sln)
5-1, 0-3 (agg 5-4)
Ekranas (Lit) v HJK Helsinki (Fin)
1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2)
Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr) v Zeljeznicar (Bos)
5-0, 1-0 (agg 6-0)
Inter Baku (Aze) v Lech Poznan (Pol)
0-1, 1-0 (aet) (agg 1-1; Lech 9-8 on pens)
Levadia Tallinn (Est) v Debrecen (Hun)
1-1, 2-3 (agg 3-4)
Linfield (Nlr) v Rosenborg (Nor)
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Litex Lovech (Bul) v Rudar Pljevlja
1-0, 4-0 (agg 5-0)
Metalurgs Liepaja (Lat) v Sparta Prague (Cze)
0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5)
Omonia (Cyp) v Renova (Mac)
3-0, 2-0 (agg 5-0)
Partizan Belgrade (Ser) v Pyunik (Arm)
3-1, 1-0 (agg 4-1)
Salzburg (Aut) v HB Torshavn (Far)
5-0, 0-1 (agg 5-1)
Sheriff (Mol) v Dinamo Tirana (Alb)
3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2)

3rd qualifying round draw

AIK Stockholm v Rosenborg
Ajax (Hol) v PAOK Salonika (Gre)
Aktobe v Hapoel Tel Aviv
BATE Borisov v Copenhagen (Den)
Debrecen v Basle (Swi)
Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) v Gent (Blg)
Litex Lovech v Zilina
Omonia v Salzburg
Partizan Belgrade v HJK Helsinki
Sheriff v Dinamo Zagreb
Sparta Prague v Lech Poznan
Sporting Braga (Por) v Celtic (Sco)
The New Saints v Anderlecht (Blg)
Unirea Urziceni (Rom) v Zenit St Petersburg (Rus)
Young Boys (Swi) v Fenerbahce (Tur)

1st legs - July 27/28; 2nd legs - August 3/4
(losing teams enter Europa League at 4th qualifying round stage)

4th qualifying round

Direct entrants:
Auxerre (Fra)
Sampdoria (Ita)
Sevilla (Spa)
Tottenham (Eng)
Werder Bremen (Ger)

1st legs - August 17/18; 2nd legs - August 24/25
(losing teams enter Europa League at group stage)

Group stage

Direct entrants:
Arsenal (Eng)
Barcelona (Spa)
Bayern Munich (Ger)
Benfica (Por)
Bursaspor (Tur)
CFR Cluj (Rom)
Chelsea (Eng)
Internazionale (Ita; holders)
Lyon (Fra)
Manchester United (Eng)
Marseille (Fra)
Milan (Ita)
Panathinaikos (Gre)
Rangers (Sco)
Real Madrid (Spa)
Roma (Ita)
Rubin Kazan (Rus)
Schalke (Ger)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
Twente Enschede (Hol)
Valencia (Spa)

Matchdays:
September 14/15; September 28/29; October 19/20; November 2/3; November 23/24; December 7/8
(top two in each of the eight groups qualify for 1st knockout round; the eight third-placed teams enter Europa League at 1st knockout round stage)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st qualifying round

1st legs - July 1; 2nd legs - July 8
Anorthosis (Cyp) v Banants (Arm)
3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) v Flora Tallinn (Est)
2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1)
Grevenmacher (Lux) v Dundalk (Rlr)
3-3, 1-2 (agg 4-5)
Kalmar (Swe) v EB/Streymur (Far)
1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0)
KF Tirana (Alb) v Zalaegerszeg (Hun)
0-0, 1-0 (aet) (agg 1-0)
KR Reykjavik (Ice) v Glentoran (Nlr)
3-0, 2-2 (agg 5-2)
Laci (Alb) v Dnepr Mogilev (Bls)
1-1, 1-7 (agg 2-8)
Llanelli (Wal) v Tauras (Lit)
2-2, 2-3 (aet) (agg 4-5)
Nitra (Slk) v Gyor (Hun)
2-2, 1-3 (agg 3-5)
NSI Runavik (Far) v Gefle (Swe)
0-2, 1-2 (agg 1-4)
Olimpia Balti (Mol) v Xazar Lankaran (Aze)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; Olimpia on away goals)
Olimpija Ljubljana (Sln) v Siroki Brijeg (Bos)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Portadown (Nlr) v Skonto Riga (Lat)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Qarabag (Aze) v Metalurg Skopje (Mac)
4-1, 1-1 (agg 5-2)
Rabotnicki (Mac) v Lusitans (And)
5-0, 6-0 (agg 11-0)
Randers (Den) v F91 Dudelange (Lux)
6-1, 1-2 (agg 7-3)
Shakhtyor Karagandy (Kaz) v Ruch Chorzow (Pol)
1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3)
Sibenik (Cro) v Sliema Wanderers (Mlt)
0-0, 3-0 (agg 3-0)
Tobol Kostanay (Kaz) v Zrinjski (Bos)
1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4)
Torpedo Zhodino (Bls) v Fylkir (Ice)
3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1)
TPS Turku (Fin) v Port Talbot Town (Wal)
3-1, 4-0 (agg 7-1)
Trans Narva (Est) v MyPa (Fin)
0-2, 0-5 (agg 0-7)
UE Santa Coloma (And) v Mogren (Mne)
0-3, 0-2 (agg 0-5)
Ulisses (Arm) v Bnei Yehuda (Isr)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Zestaponi (Geo) v Faetano (SaM)
5-0, 0-0 (agg 5-0)
Zeta (Mne) v Dacia Chisinau (Mol)
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1; Dacia on away goals)

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 15; 2nd legs - July 22/23
Anorthosis v Sibenik
0-2, 3-0 (aet) (agg 3-2)
Atyrau (Kaz) v Gyor
0-3*, 0-2 (agg 0-5)
Austria Wien (Aut) v Siroki Brijeg
2-2, 1-0 (agg 3-2)
Besa (Alb) v Olympiakos (Gre)
0-5, 1-6 (agg 1-11)
Besiktas (Tur) v Vikingur (Far)
3-0, 4-0 (agg 7-0)
Brondby (Den) v Vaduz (Lie)
3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0)
Cercle Brugge (Blg) v TPS Turku
0-1, 2-1 (agg 2-2; Cercle on away goals)
Cliftonville (Nlr) v Cibalia (Cro)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Differdange (Lux) v Spartak Zlatibor Voda (Ser)
3-3, 0-2 (agg 3-5)
Dinamo Minsk (Bls) v Sillamae Kalev (Est)
5-1, 5-0 (agg 10-1)
Elfsborg (Swe) v Iskra-Stal (Mol)
2-1, 1-0 (agg 3-1)
FK Baku (Aze) v Buducnost Podgorica (Mne)
0-3**, 2-1 (agg 2-4)
Gefle v Dinamo Tbilisi
1-2, 1-2 (agg 2-4)
Gorica (Sln) v Randers
0-3, 1-1 (agg 1-4)
Honka Espoo (Fin) v Bangor City (Wal)
1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)
Kalmar v Dacia Chisinau
0-0, 2-0 (agg 2-0)
KR Reykjavik v Karpaty Lviv (Ukr)
0-3, 2-3 (agg 2-6)
Lausanne (Swi) v Borac Banja Luka (Bos)
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Levski Sofia (Bul) v Dundalk
6-0, 2-0 (agg 8-0)
Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr) v Mogren
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
Maritimo (Por) v Sporting Fingal (Rlr)
3-2, 3-2 (agg 6-4)
Molde (Nor) v Jelgava (Lat)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; Molde on away goals)
Motherwell (Sco) v Breidablik (Ice)
1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)
MyPa v Sant Julia (And)
3-0, 5-0 (agg 8-0)
OFK Belgrade (Ser) v Torpedo Khodino
2-2, 1-0 (agg 3-2)
Olimpia Balti v Dinamo Bucharest (Rom)
0-2, 1-5 (agg 1-7)
Portadown v Qarabag
1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3)
Rabotnicki v Mika Ashtarak (Arm)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Shamrock Rovers (Rlr) v Bnei Yehuda
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Siauliai (Lit) v Wisla Krakow (Pol)
0-2, 0-5 (agg 0-7)
Stabaek (Nor) v Dnepr Mogilev
2-2, 1-1 (agg 3-3; Dnepr on away goals)
Suduva (Lit) v Rapid Wien (Aut)
0-2, 2-4 (agg 2-6)
Tauras v APOEL (Cyp)
0-3, 1-3 (agg 1-6)
Utrecht (Hol) v KF Tirana
4-0, 1-1 (agg 5-1)
Valletta (Mlt) v Ruch Chorzow
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1; Ruch on away goals)
Ventspils (Lat) v Teteks (Mac)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Videoton (Hun) v Maribor (Sln)
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
WIT Georgia (Geo) v Banik Ostrava (Cze)
0-6, 0-0 (agg 0-6)
Zestaponi v Dukla Banska Bystrica (Slk)
3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)
Zrinjski v Tre Penne (SaM)
4-1, 9-2 (agg 13-3)

**Atyrau v Gyor – 1st leg finished 2-0 to Gyor but was awarded 3-0 to Gyor because Atyrau fielded an ineligible player*
***FK Baku v Buducnost Podgorica – 1st leg finished 2-1 to FK Baku but was awarded 3-0 to Buducnost because Baku fielded an ineligible player*

3rd qualifying round draw

Aalesund (Nor) v Motherwell
APOEL v Jablonec (Cze)
AZ Alkmaar (Hol) v IFK Gothenburg (Swe)
Beroe (Bul) v Rapid Wien
Buducnost Podgorica v Brondby

Banned...Mallorca fans protest

League, pending an appeal by the financially troubled club.

Mallorca, who qualified for the competition after finishing fifth last season, went into voluntary administration in May in an attempt to sort out their finances and were therefore not granted the requisite licence by UEFA.

A recent study carried out by the University of Barcelona indicated that Mallorca had debts of around £85million.

AUSTRIA

Bad beginning

LASK's season got off to a poor start as they shipped nine goals in their opening two games, against Wiener Neustadt and Austria Wien.

CROATIA

Six-goal start

Croatian Cup holders Hajduk got off to a flier on the opening weekend of the new season, beating Istra 6-1.

Meanwhile, reigning champions Dinamo also made an impressive start, running out 4-1 winners against Zagreb neighbours Hrvatski Dragovoljac.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Sparta's Super Cup

Last season's league champions Sparta Prague beat Czech Cup holder Viktoria Plzen 1-0 in the Super Cup with a goal from Libor Sionko.

DENMARK

No rest for the Danes

With the new league season kicking off just one week after the World Cup Final, reigning champions Copenhagen picked up where they left off last term with two wins from their first two games.

Cercle Brugge v Anorthosis
CSKA Sofia (Bul) v Cliftonville
Dinamo Bucharest v Hajduk Split (Cro)
Dnepr Mogilev v Banik Ostrava
Elfsborg v Teteks
Galatasaray (Tur) v OFK Belgrade
Gyor v Montpellier (Fra)
Inter Turku (Fin) v Genk (Blg)
Jagiellonia Bialystok (Pol) v Aris (Gre)
Kalmar v Levski Sofia
Karpaty Lviv v Zestaponi
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) v Dinamo Minsk
Maribor v Hibernian (Sco)
Maritimo v Bangor City
Molde v Stuttgart (Ger)
MyPa v Timisoara (Rom)
Nordsjaelland (Den) v Sporting Lisbon (Por)
OB Odense (Den) v Zrinjski
Olympiakos v Maccabi Tel Aviv
Plzen (Cze) v Besiktas
Rabotnicki v Liverpool (Eng)
Randers v Lausanne
Red Star Belgrade (Ser) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk)
Ruch Chorzow v Austria Wien
Shamrock Rovers v Juventus (Ita)
Sibir Novosibirsk (Rus) v Apollon (Cyp)
Spartak Zlatibor Voda v Dnipro (Ukr)
Sturm Graz (Aut) v Dinamo Tbilisi
Utrecht v Lucerne (Swi)
Wisla Krakow v Qarabag

1st legs - July 27-29; 2nd legs - August 3-5

4th qualifying round

Direct entrants:
AEK Athens (Gre)
Aston Villa (Eng)
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
Club Brugge (Blg)
CSKA Moscow (Rus)
Dundee United (Sco)
Feyenoord (Hol)
Getafe (Spa)
Grasshopper (Swi)
Lille (Fra)
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
Mallorca (Spa)
Manchester City (Eng)
Metalist (Ukr)
Napoli (Ita)
Palermo (Ita)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
Porto (Por)
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
Steaua Bucharest (Rom)
Tavriya (Ukr)
Trabzonspor (Tur)
Vaslui (Rom)
Plus, the 15 losing teams from the Champions League 3rd qualifying round

1st legs - August 19; 2nd legs - August 26

Group stage

Direct entrant:
Atletico Madrid (Spa; holders)
Plus, the 10 losing teams from the Champions League 4th qualifying round

Matchdays:
September 16; September 30; October 21; November 4; December 1/2; December 15/16
(top two in each of the 12 groups qualify for 1st knockout round, in which they will be joined by the eight third-placed teams from the Champions League group stage)

AUSTRIA

July 17: Kapfenberger 0 Salzburg 0; Wiener Neustadt 5 LASK 0; Ried 0 Sturm 3.
July 18: Wacker 4 Rapid 0; Austria 2 Mattersburg 0.
July 24: Sturm 2 Kapfenberger 0; Mattersburg 1 Ried 4.
July 25: Rapid 1 Wiener Neustadt 2; LASK 3 Austria 4.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
W Neustadt	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Sturm	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Austria	2	2	0	0	6	3	6
Wacker	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
Ried	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Salzburg	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kapfenberger	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Mattersburg	2	0	0	2	1	6	0
Rapid	2	0	0	2	1	6	0
LASK	2	0	0	2	3	9	0

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated

BELARUS

BELARUS	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
BATE	19	12	6	1	32	4	42
Shakhtyor	19	10	7	2	26	11	37
FK Minsk	19	11	3	5	32	15	36
Dinamo Minsk	19	11	3	5	29	13	36
Belshina	19	8	4	7	18	24	28
Dinamo Brest	19	7	6	6	26	20	27
Dnepr	19	6	4	9	16	31	22
Naftan	18	4	8	6	18	16	20
Vitebsk	19	3	9	7	17	27	18
Neman	19	2	9	8	12	23	15
Torpedo	18	3	4	11	19	34	13
Partizan	19	2	5	12	10	37	11

Standings on July 27
33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

CROATIA

July 23: Zagreb 3 Lokomotiva 1.
July 24: Dinamo 4 Hrvatski Dragovoljac 1; Rijeka 1 RNK 0; Varazdin* 2 Zadar 1; Karlovac 3 Inter 0; Hajduk 6 Istra 1.
July 25: Slaven 1 Sibenik 0; Cibalia 3 Osijek 0.

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hajduk	1	1	0	0	6	1	3
Dinamo	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Cibalia	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Karlovac	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Zagreb	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Varazdin*	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Rijeka	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Slaven	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Zadar	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
RNK	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Sibenik	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Lokomotiva	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
H Dragovoljac	1	0	0	1	1	4	0
Inter	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Osijek	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Istra	1	0	0	1	1	6	0

30-round season (15x2); bottom 3 will be relegated
**Formerly Varteks*

CZECH REPUBLIC

July 16: Bohemians 1905 1 Slavia 1.
July 17: Hradec Kralove 2 Sparta 1; Slovacko 3 Teplice 0.
July 18: Pribram 0 Ostrava 0; Usti nad Labem 0 Mlada Boleslav 2; Plzen 2 Olomouc 2; Ceske Budejovice 0 Liberec 0.
July 19: Jablonec 1 Brno 0.
July 23: Mlada Boleslav 1 Ceske Budejovice 1.
July 24: Liberec 2 Plzen 3; Sparta 2 Slovacko 1.
July 25: Brno 1 Usti nad Labem 3; Ostrava 1 Slavia 1; Olomouc 4 Jablonec 1; Teplice 1 Pribram 2.
July 26: Hradec Kralove 1 Bohemians 1905 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olomouc	2	1	1	0	6	3	4
M Boleslav	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Plzen	2	1	1	0	5	4	4
H Kralove	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Pribram	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Slovacko	2	1	0	1	4	2	3
Sparta	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Usti	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Jablonec	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Boh'ians 1905	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Slavia	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
C Budejovice	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Ostrava	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Liberec	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Brno	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Teplice	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

DENMARK

July 17: OB 3 Esbjerg 0.
July 18: Horsens 0 Midtjylland 2; Randers 3 Brondby 2; Nordsjaelland 4 Silkeborg 1; SonderjyskE 1 Copenhagen 3.
July 19: Lyngby 2 AaB 4.
July 24: Midtjylland 2 Silkeborg 0; Esbjerg 1 Copenhagen 2.
July 25: Lyngby 1 Horsens 0; Nordsjaelland 1 SonderjyskE 2; AaB 0 Brondby 2.
July 26: OB 1 Randers 1.

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Midtjylland	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Copenhagen	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
OB	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
Randers	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Nordsjaelland	2	1	0	1	5	3	3
Brondby	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
AaB	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Lyngby	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
SonderjyskE	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Horsens	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Esbjerg	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
Silkeborg	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

33-round season (11x3); bottom 2 will be relegated

ESTONIA

ESTONIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levadia	22	15	6	1	56	10	51
Flora	19	14	3	2	39	15	45
Trans	22	13	6	3	39	17	45
Sillamae	19	11	3	5	49	22	36
Kalju	20	10	6	4	36	19	36
Tammeka	22	8	6	8	30	30	30
Tulevik	22	5	2	15	17	33	17
Lootus	22	5	0	17	16	56	15
Kuressaare	21	3	2	16	16	58	11
Paide	21	2	4	15	11	49	10

Standings on July 27
36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

FINLAND

July 9: Inter 2 Honka 0.
July 10: HJK 3 Tampere 1.
July 11: Oulu 0 Jaro 1; VPS 2 MyPa 1; Lahti 1 TPS 3.
July 12: Haka 1 JJK 2; KuPS 0 Mariehamn 0.
July 16: Jaro 2 Lahti 0.
July 17: HJK 1 KuPS 2.
July 18: Mariehamn 3 Inter 0; MyPa 2 Honka 2; TPS 1 Haka 1.
July 19: Tampere 3 Oulu 1; JJK 0 VPS 1.
July 23: Lahti 2 KuPS 1.
July 24: Haka 0 HJK 3.
July 25: Honka 1 TPS 0; Inter 2 Jaro 0.
July 26: JJK 0 Tampere 1; VPS 1 Mariehamn 4.

FINLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HJK	15	10	3	2	27	9	33
Honka	15	8	3	4	23	15	27
Tampere	15	7	4	4	23	22	25
KuPS	15	7	3	5	24	22	24
Jaro	15	6	3	6	20	18	21
Inter	15	6	3	6	19	19	21
VPS	15	6	3	6	17	19	21
JJK	15	6	1	8	18	18	19
TPS	15	4	6	5	17	19	18
Haka	15	5	3	7	20	25	18
Mariehamn	15	4	5	6	22	21	17
MyPa	14	4	5	5	19	22	17
Oulu	14	4	2	8	15	24	14
Lahti	15	2	6	7	13	24	12

26-round season (13x2); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

FRANCE

League fixtures, opening round*

Sat, August 7
Auxerre v Lorient
Lens v Nancy
Lyon v Monaco
Marseille v Caen
Nice v Valenciennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Saint-Etienne
Rennes v Lille
Sochaux v Arles-Avignon
Toulouse v Brest
Sun, August 8
Montpellier v Bordeaux

**For full fixture list, visit www.worldsoccer.com*

WORLD SERVICE

Future plans...Jonsson

HUNGARY

Szakaly on target

Debrecen won the Hungarian Super Cup 1-0 with a goal from Peter Szakaly.

NORWAY

New year, new job for Stabaek's Jonsson

Swedish coach Jan Jonsson will take charge of Rosenborg in January. The 50-year-old, who is currently boss of Stabaek, will succeed Erik Hamren, who left to lead Sweden in May.

RUSSIA

Kazan cup shock as Zenit march on

Reigning league champions Rubin Kazan were knocked out of the Russian Cup by Volgar-Gazprom Astrakhan.

Kirill Maruschak scored the only goal of the game for the second division side.

Meanwhile, current championship leaders Zenit extended their winning streak in the league to eight games with a 3-1 win away to Rostov.

Alexander Kerzhakov, Danny and Viktor Faizulin scored for the 2007 title winners, with Igor Lebedenko grabbing a late consolation from the penalty spot for the hosts.

SWITZERLAND

Gygax opening double

Lucerne made a storming start to the new season with a 4-0 hammering of St Gallen. Daniel Gygax scored twice for the hosts with Hakan Yakin and Nelson Ferreira also on the scoresheet.

However, a 1-1 draw at Young Boys means they trail leaders Basle by two points after just two games.

GERMANY

League fixtures, opening round*

Fri, August 20
Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Sat, August 21
Freiburg v St Pauli
Hamburg v Schalke
Hannover v Eintracht Frankfurt
1899 Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen
Koln v Kaiserslautern
Monchengladbach v Nurnberg
Sun, August 22
Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v Stuttgart

**For full fixture list, visit www.worldsoccer.com*

HOLLAND

League fixtures, opening round*

Fri, August 6
Roda JC v Twente
Sat, August 7
De Graafschap v Excelsior
Heerenveen v PSV
Heracles v Willem II
NEC v VVV
Sun, August 8
Feyenoord v Utrecht
Groningen v Ajax
NAC v AZ
Vitesse v Den Haag

**For full fixture list, visit www.worldsoccer.com*

ICELAND

ICELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
IBV	13	9	2	2	22	10	29
Breidablik	13	8	2	3	29	16	26
FH	13	6	4	3	24	19	22
Fram	13	5	5	3	21	18	20
Keflavik	13	5	5	3	13	14	20
Valur	13	4	6	3	21	21	18
Stjarnan	13	4	5	4	23	21	17
KR	12	4	4	4	20	18	16
Fylkir	12	4	3	5	24	24	15
Grindavik	13	2	3	8	13	23	9
Selfoss	13	2	2	9	15	29	8
Haukar	13	0	7	6	16	28	7

Standings on July 27
22-round season (11x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

LATVIA

LATVIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ventspils	13	11	1	1	35	5	34
Skonto	12	10	1	1	40	8	31
Metalurgs	13	8	3	2	27	9	27
Daugava	13	7	4	2	15	8	25
Jurmala	13	6	1	6	19	20	19
Jelgava	12	3	2	7	21	20	11
Tranzits	13	3	2	8	8	20	11
Jauniba	13	3	1	9	8	39	10
Blazma	13	3	0	10	10	33	9
Olimps/RFS	13	2	1	10	14	35	7

Standings on July 27
27-round season (9x3); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

LITHUANIA

LITHUANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ekranas	15	12	2	1	35	7	38
Suduva	15	9	6	0	29	7	33
Zalgiris	15	10	3	2	29	9	33
Tauras	13	7	3	3	16	6	24
Banga	15	5	5	5	16	17	20
Siauliai	15	4	6	5	17	20	18
Kruoja	13	4	2	7	17	27	14
Klaipeda	13	1	3	9	10	31	6
Mazeikiai	14	0	5	9	9	31	5
Atletas*	14	0	3	11	7	30	-3

Standings on July 27
27-round season (9x3)
Vetra withdrew from league; all results expunged
**6pts deducted for licence irregularities*

MOLDOVA

MOLDOVA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sheriff	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Zimbru	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Costuleni	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Dacia	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Iskra-Stal	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Milsami*	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Olimpia	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Nistru	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Academia	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
CSCA-Rapid	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Dinamo	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Gagauziya	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
S Gheorghe	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Tiraspol	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

Standings on July 27
39-round season (13x3); bottom team will be relegated
**Formerly Viitorul*

NORWAY

July 10: Aalesund 0 Molde 0; Sandefjord 1 Start 2; Lillestrom 1 Rosenborg 2; Stabaek 2 Viking 3; Honefoss 2 Tromso 2; Haugesund 1 Brann 1.
July 11: Kongsvinger 0 Stromsgodset 2.
July 12: Odd Grenland 1 Valerenga 2.
July 17: Valerenga 5 Kongsvinger 2.
July 18: Start 1 Aalesund 0; Brann 2 Stabaek 2; Stromsgodset 2 Haugesund 1; Viking 4 Honefoss 0; Molde 0 Sandefjord 0; Rosenborg 1 Odd Grenland 1.
July 19: Tromso 0 Lillestrom 0.
July 24: Aalesund 1 Valerenga 0.
July 25: Sandefjord 1 Brann 4; Stabaek 1 Rosenborg 2; Molde 1 Start 2; Kongsvinger 1 Tromso 1; Haugesund 4 Viking 0; Odd Grenland 2 Stromsgodset 0.
July 26: Honefoss 3 Lillestrom 2.

NORWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosenborg	18	11	7	0	32	10	40
Valerenga	18	10	4	4	38	20	34
Tromso	18	9	6	3	21	14	33
Aalesund	18	9	3	6	26	19	30
Viking	18	8	5	5	28	20	29
Start	18	8	4	6	32	30	28
Stromsgodset	18	8	2	8	26	34	26
Odd Grenland	18	6	7	5	29	28	25
Lillestrom	18	5	9	4	29	22	24
Haugesund	18	6	6	6	29	24	24
Stabaek	18	6	6	6	28	26	24
Brann	18	5	6	7	27	28	21
Molde	18	4	6	8	27	35	18
Honefoss	18	4	4	10	13	34	16
Kongsvinger	18	3	3	12	15	37	12
Sandefjord	18	1	4	13	12	31	7

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated; 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

PORTUGAL

League fixtures, opening round*

Fri, August 13
Braga v Portimonense
Sat, August 14
Maritimo v Setubal
Naval v Porto
Pacos Ferreira v Sporting Lisbon
Sun, August 15
Beira Mar v Uniao Leiria
Benfica v Academica
Rio Ave v Nacional
Mon, August 16
Olhanense v Guimaraes

**For full fixture list, visit www.worldsoccer.com*

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

July 9: Bray 0 Fingal 3; St Patrick's 2 UCD 1; Sligo 3 Galway 0.
July 11: Shamrock 4 Dundalk 0.
July 13: Sligo 2 UCD 1.
July 16: Bohemians 2 Sligo 0; UCD 4 Bray 0.
July 18: Dundalk 0 St Patrick's 3; Galway 0 Shamrock 1.
July 19: Fingal 1 Drogheda 2.
July 23: Bray 0 Bohemians 3; Drogheda 2 Sligo 3.
July 25: Galway 1 Dundalk 1; St Patrick's 1 Fingal 1.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Patrick's	22	12	5	5	35	14	41
Shamrock	22	11	8	3	26	15	41
Bohemians	21	11	6	4	31	16	39
Fingal	22	8	10	4	29	20	34
Sligo	23	8	9	6	35	23	33
Dundalk	22	9	5	8	26	29	32
UCD	22	8	5	9	28	23	29
Galway	23	5	8	10	22	32	23
Drogheda	22	4	6	12	22	44	18
Bray	21	1	4	16	12	50	7

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd & 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

ROMANIA

July 23: Sportul 0 Otelul 1; Pandurii 0 Urziceni 0; Rapid 2 Vaslui 0.
July 24: Univ Craiova 0 CFR 0; Timisoara 2 Gloria 2.
July 25: Univ Cluj 1 Steaua 2; Astra 1 Dinamo 2.
July 26: Tirgu-Mures 0 Brasov 1; Victoria 2 Gaz Metan 3.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rapid	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Gaz Metan	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Dinamo	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Steaua	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Brasov	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Otelul	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Gloria	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Timisoara	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
CFR	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Pandurii	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Univ Craiova	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Urziceni	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Victoria	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Astra	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Univ Cluj	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Sportul	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Tirgu-Mures	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Vaslui	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

34-round season (17x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

RUSSIA

July 8: Spartak Nalchik 2 Terek 1.
July 9: Sibir 2 Dynamo 2; Rubin 3 Krylia Sovetov 0; Alania 1 Zenit 3; Rostov 1 Spartak Moscow 0.
July 10: CSKA 1 Saturn 1; Amkar 2 Tom 1; Anzhi 1 Lokomotiv 2.
July 17: Zenit 2 Sibir 0; Dynamo 3 Rostov 2; Spartak Moscow 0 Rubin 1.
July 18: Tom 1 Anzhi 4; Terek 1 Amkar 0; Lokomotiv 3 Alania 0.
July 19: Krylia Sovetov 0 CSKA 1; Saturn 3 Spartak Nalchik 1.
July 21: Spartak Moscow 5 Sibir 3.
July 24: Rubin 2 Dynamo 0; Alania 2 Tom 1; Rostov 1 Zenit 3.
July 25: Sibir 2 Lokomotiv 2; Anzhi 1 Terek 0; CSKA 1 Spartak Nalchik 2; Amkar 0 Saturn 1; Krylia Sovetov 0 Spartak Moscow 0.

RUSSIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zenit	14	11	3	0	23	6	36
Rubin	14	8	5	1	15	3	29
CSKA	14	8	3	3	22	12	27
Spartak N	14	7	4	3	19	14	25
Lokomotiv	14	6	4	4	20	14	22
Spartak M	14	5	5	4	19	16	20
Rostov	14	6	1	7	15	22	19
Dynamo	14	4	6	4	15	15	18
Tom	14	5	3	6	17	20	18
Terek	14	4	5	5	13	13	17
Anzhi	14	4	4	6	16	16	16
Alania	14	4	3	7	15	22	15
Saturn	14	3	5	6	10	13	14
Amkar	14	3	3	8	9	16	12
Sibir	14	2	3	9	19	31	9
Krylia Sovetov	14	2	3	9	8	22	9

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SLOVAKIA

July 17: Zilina 2 Zlate Moravce 1; Nitra 3 Dubnica 2; Ruzomberok 1 Tatran 0; Spartak 3 Senica 0.
July 18: Dukla 2 DAC 0; Slovan 2 Kosice 0.
July 24: Zilina 2 Slovan 2; Zlate Moravce 2 Spartak 0; Tatran 0 Senica 1; Dubnica 1 Ruzomberok 0; DAC 0 Nitra 1.
July 25: Kosice 1 Dukla 1.

Two-goal start...Gygax (right)

UKRAINE

Seven-goal thrashing in showpiece opener

Reigning league champions Shakhtar Donetsk were on top form as they thrashed Ukrainian Cup winners Tavriya 7-1 in the Super Cup with goals from Oleksandr Gladkiy (two), Jadson, Willian, Luiz Adriano (two) and Razvan Rat.

Maksym Feschuk replied for Tavriya.

More silverware...Shakhtar

BRAZIL

New national coach gets the perfect send off

Corinthians gave boss Mano Menezes the perfect send-off in his last game before taking over as national coach by beating Guarani 3-1 to go top of the Brazilian championship.

Menezes, who was given a standing ovation by the fans, led Corinthians out of the second division in his first season in charge in 2008. He will be replaced by Adilson Batista, who was fired by Cruzeiro last month.

Corinthians overtook Fluminense, whose coach Muricy Ramalho was offered the Brazil job before Menezes, but turned it down after his club refused to release him.

Flu were held 1-1 by Botafogo in a bad-tempered derby which produced three red cards.

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nitra	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Slovan	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Dukla	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Zilina	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Spartak	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Zlate Moravce	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Dubnica	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Ruzomberok	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Senica	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Kosice	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Tatran	2	0	0	2	0	2	0
DAC	2	0	0	2	0	3	0

33-round season (11x3); bottom team will be relegated

SLOVENIA

July 16: Koper 4 Primorje 1.
July 17: Celje 0 Domzale 1.
July 18: Olimpija 1 Rudar 3; Maribor 5 Triglav 0; Gorica 1 Nafta 0.
July 24: Nafta 2 Primorje 1; Domzale 2 Koper 0; Triglav 1 Celje 1.
July 25: Rudar 0 Maribor 0; Gorica 2 Olimpija 2.

SLOVENIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Domzale	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Maribor	2	1	1	0	5	0	4
Rudar	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Gorica	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Koper	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Nafta	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Celje	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Olimpija	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Triglav	2	0	1	1	1	6	1
Primorje	2	0	0	2	2	6	0

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SPAIN

League fixtures, opening round*

Sat/Sun, August 28/29
Atletico Madrid v Sporting Gijon
Deportivo La Coruna v Zaragoza
Espanyol v Getafe
Hercules v Athletic Bilbao
Levante v Sevilla
Malaga v Valencia
Mallorca v Real Madrid
Osasuna v Almeria
Racing Santander v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Villarreal

**For full fixture list, visit www.worldsoccer.com*

SWEDEN

July 17: Mjallby 0 Brommapojkarna 0; IFK 3 Halmstads 0; AIK 2 Malmo 0.
July 18: Elfsborg 3 Orebro 3; Djurgardens 0 Kalmar 2; Trelleborgs 2 Gefle 1; GAIS 0 Atvidabergs 0.
July 22: Hacken 2 Helsingborgs 1.
July 24: Brommapojkarna 1 Mjallby 0; Atvidabergs 0 GAIS 1; Malmo 1 AIK 0.
July 25: Halmstads 1 IFK 0; Kalmar 0 Djurgardens 1; Gefle 1 Trelleborgs 3.
July 26: Helsingborgs 3 Hacken 1; Orebro 3 Elfsborg 0.

SWEDEN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Helsingborgs	16	12	2	2	24	9	38
Malmo	16	10	3	3	30	18	33
Orebro	16	9	2	5	23	17	29
Mjallby	16	7	4	5	18	12	25
Elfsborg	16	6	6	4	30	22	24
Kalmar	16	5	7	4	19	19	22
Bromm'karna	16	6	4	6	13	15	22
GAIS	16	5	6	5	13	16	21
Halmstads	16	6	2	8	16	21	20
Djurgardens	16	5	4	7	15	18	19
Hacken	16	5	4	7	16	22	19
IFK	16	4	6	6	19	13	18
Trelleborgs	16	5	3	8	15	25	18
Gefle	16	4	4	8	15	21	16
AIK	16	4	3	9	13	20	15
Atvidabergs	16	3	4	9	14	25	13

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated; 3rd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

SWITZERLAND

July 17: Grasshopper 1 Xamax 1; Thun 1 Young Boys 1.
July 18: Bellinzona 0 Sion 2; Lucerne 4 St Gallen 0.
July 20: Basle 3 Zurich 2.
July 24: Sion 1 Basle 2; Young Boys 1 Lucerne 1.
July 25: Xamax 2 Thun 3; St Gallen 3 Bellinzona 2; Zurich 2 Grasshopper 0.

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Basle	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Lucerne	2	1	1	0	5	1	4
Thun	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Zurich	2	1	0	1	4	3	3
Sion	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
St Gallen	2	1	0	1	3	6	3
Young Boys	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Xamax	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Grasshopper	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Bellinzona	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

36-round season (9x4); bottom team will be relegated; 2nd bottom will enter rel/prom play-off

UKRAINE

July 9: Zorya 0 Sevastopol 0; Arsenal 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0; Illichivets 1 Metalurh Donetsk 1; Obolon 2 Dynamo 2.
July 10: Volyn 0 Vorskla 4; Tavriya 0 Metalist 1; Dnipro 1 Karpaty 0; Shakhtar 2 Kryvbas 0.
July 16: Metalurh Donetsk 3 Obolon 0.
July 17: Sevastopol 0 Metalist 0; Vorskla 1 Illichivets 3; Dynamo 2 Tavriya 1.
July 18: Zorya 0 Arsenal 2; Dnipro 2 Volyn 0; Metalurh Zaporizhya 1 Shakhtar 1; Kryvbas 0 Karpaty 0.
July 23: Volyn 0 Kryvbas 0; Metalist 1 Dynamo 2.
July 24: Tavriya 2 Metalurh Donetsk 1; Arsenal 0 Sevastopol 1; Illichivets 1 Dnipro 5.
July 25: Obolon 0 Vorskla 1; Karpaty 1 Metalurh Zaporizhya 0; Shakhtar 1 Zorya 0.

UKRAINE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dnipro	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Shakhtar	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Dynamo	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Vorskla	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Arsenal	3	2	0	1	3	1	6
Sevastopol	3	1	2	0	1	0	5
Metalurh D	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Metalist	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Karpaty	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Illichivets	3	1	1	1	5	7	4
Tavriya	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Kryvbas	3	0	2	1	0	2	2
Metalurh Z	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Zorya	3	0	1	2	0	3	1
Obolon	3	0	1	2	2	6	1
Volyn	3	0	1	2	0	6	1

30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

SOUTH AMERICA

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round draw

Universitario (Bol) v Colo Colo (Chl) (A)
Guarani (Par) v River Plate (Uru) (B)
Cesar Vallejo (Per) v Barcelona (Ecu) (C)
Atletico Huila (Col) v Trujillanos (Ven) (D)
Chile 3rd reps v Oriente Petrolero (Bol) (E)
Defensor Sporting (Uru) v Olimpia (Par) (F)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu) v San Martin (Per) (G)
Deportivo Lara (Ven) v Indep Santa Fe (Col) (H)

2nd round draw

Game D winners v San Jose (Bol)
Independiente (Arg) v Argentinos Juniors (Arg)
Game C winners v Penarol (Uru)
Vitoria (Bra) v Palmeiras (Bra)
Game H winners v Caracas (Ven)
Santos (Bra) v Avai (Bra)
Game E winners v Tolima (Col)
Game B winners v San Felipe (Chl)
Velez Sarsfield (Arg) v Banfield (Arg)
Game G winners v Emelec (Ecu)
Gremio Prudente (Bra) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
Game A winners v Cerro Porteno (Par)
Goias (Bra) v Gremio (Bra)
Game F winners v Huancayo (Per)
Newell's Old Boys (Arg) v Estudiantes (Arg)

Bye to last 16: LDU Quito (Ecu; holders)

1st and 2nd round games scheduled to be played between August 3 and September 29

ARGENTINA

Apertura fixtures, opening round

Fri/Sat/Sun, August 6-8
Argentinos Juniors v Huracan
Arsenal v Lanus
Banfield v Olimpo
Gimnasia La Plata v San Lorenzo
Godoy Cruz v Boca Juniors
Newell's Old Boys v Estudiantes
Quilmes v Colon
Racing Club v All Boys
River Plate v Tigre
Velez Sarsfield v Independiente

BOLIVIA

Clausura

July 24: La Paz 1 Potosi 2.
July 25: The Strongest 4 Aurora 2; Universitario 2 San Jose 2; Guabira 1 Oriente 1; Wilstermann 0 Bolivar 1; Mamore 0 Blooming 0.

BOLIVIA – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
The Strongest	1	1	0	0	4	2	3
Potosi	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Bolivar	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
San Jose	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Universitario	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Guabira	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Oriente	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Blooming	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Mamore	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
La Paz	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Wilstermann	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Aurora	1	0	0	1	2	4	0

22-round tournament (11x2); team with worst average points over two most recent seasons will be relegated; 2nd worst will enter rel/prom play-off

BRAZIL

July 14: Gremio 1 Vitoria 1; Paranaense 0 Cruzeiro 2; Sao Paulo 1 Avai 2; Flamengo 1 Botafogo 0; Guarani 0 Internacional 3; Goias 0 Vasco da Gama 0; Ceara 0 Corinthians 0.
July 15: Palmeiras 2 Santos 1; Mineiro 3 Goianiense 2; Fluminense 1 Gremio Prudente 1.
July 17: Vitoria 3 Sao Paulo 2; Vasco da Gama 3 Paranaense 1.
July 18: Corinthians 1 Mineiro 0; Goianiense 0 Flamengo 1; Avai 4 Palmeiras 2; Internacional 2 Ceara 1; Cruzeiro 1 Goias 0; Santos 0 Fluminense 1; Botafogo 1 Guarani 1; Gremio Prudente 2 Gremio 0.
July 21: Mineiro 1 Internacional 2; Vitoria 2 Goias 2; Sao Paulo 1 Gremio Prudente 1; Flamengo 1 Avai 1; Paranaense 2 Santos 0; Gremio 1 Vasco da Gama 1; Goianiense 3 Corinthians 1.
July 22: Fluminense 1 Cruzeiro 0; Guarani 1 Ceara 1; Palmeiras 2 Botafogo 2.
July 24: Avai 0 Mineiro 0; Vasco da Gama 2 Goianiense 0; Gremio Prudente 0 Vitoria 0.
July 25: Santos 1 Sao Paulo 0; Cruzeiro 2 Gremio 2; Internacional 1 Flamengo 0; Goias 0 Paranaense 2; Ceara 0 Palmeiras 0; Corinthians 3 Guarani 1; Botafogo 1 Fluminense 1.

BRAZIL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Corinthians	11	7	3	1	20	12	24
Fluminense	11	7	2	2	15	7	23
Ceara	11	5	5	1	9	4	20
Internacional	11	6	1	4	19	15	19
Avai	11	4	4	3	17	15	16
Cruzeiro	11	4	4	3	13	11	16
Flamengo	11	4	4	3	12	10	16
Santos	11	4	3	4	17	15	15
Vitoria	11	3	5	3	13	13	14
Palmeiras	11	3	5	3	12	12	14
G Prudente	11	3	5	3	13	14	14
Guarani	11	3	5	3	11	15	14
Paranaense	11	4	1	6	15	20	13
Vasco	11	3	4	4	11	14	13
Sao Paulo	11	3	3	5	13	13	12
Goias	11	3	3	5	11	15	12
Botafogo	11	2	6	3	17	16	12
Gremio	11	2	5	4	14	17	11
Mineiro	11	3	1	7	14	21	10
Goianiense	11	2	1	8	10	17	7

38-round season (19x2); bottom 4 will be relegated

CHILE

Colo Colo book place via new league format

Despite losing 2-0 away to Universidad de Concepcion, Colo Colo lead this season's championship at the halfway point and have guaranteed their place in this season's Copa Sudamericana and the 2011 Copa Libertadores.

The usual format of separate apertura and clausura tournaments was scrapped in March after the country suffered a major earthquake when only a few rounds of the apertura had been played.

PERU

Peruvians playing on

San Martin remain top of the standings as the Peruvian championship continued to play on throughout the World Cup.

Start...Pumas (left) and Toluca

MEXICO

Pumas beat champs

2010 Bicentenario winners Toluca lost their opening game of the new apertura, going down 1-0 to Pumas.

USA

Columbus still top

Columbus maintained their domination of the MLS Eastern Conference with a 3-0 win over Houston Dynamo.

Emilio Renteria put the hosts ahead before Houston's Bobby Boswell was sent off. Andy Iro and Leandre Griffit added late goals as the Crew moved eight points clear of second-placed New York.

In the West, Salt Lake missed the chance to keep the pressure on leaders Los Angeles Galaxy as they were held to a 1-1 draw by bottom side Chivas.

CHILE

July 10: Cobreloa 0 Univ Chile 2; Huachipato 1 Audax Italiano 2.
July 14: O'Higgins 3 Univ Chile 3; Colo Colo 2 Everton 0.
July 16: Espanola 1 San Felipe 2.
July 17: Nublense 0 Univ Chile 2; Audax Italiano 2 Everton 0.
July 18: La Serena 3 Cobresal 0; San Luis 0 Palestino 0; Colo Colo 2 O'Higgins 0; Wanderers 1 Univ Concepcion 0; Huachipato 1 Morning 0; Univ Catolica 2 Cobreloa 1.
July 21: Univ Catolica 1 Univ Concepcion 0.
July 22: Univ Chile 2 Audax Italiano 2.
July 24: Everton 1 Univ Catolica 1; O'Higgins 4 La Serena 0.
July 25: Univ Concepcion 2 Colo Colo 0; Morning 2 Wanderers 1; Cobreloa 5 San Luis 0; Cobresal 1 Espanola 0; San Felipe 3 Nublense 1; Palestino 2 Huachipato 1.

CHILE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	17	12	2	3	38	15	38
Univ Chile	17	11	3	3	45	24	36
Univ Catolica	17	10	4	3	31	18	34
O'Higgins	17	7	5	5	25	17	26
San Felipe	17	7	4	6	22	22	25
Espanola	17	6	7	4	24	22	25
Cobresal	17	7	3	7	27	29	24
Audax Italiano	17	7	3	7	33	38	24
Huachipato	17	6	5	6	21	21	23
Everton	17	6	4	7	20	21	22
Wanderers	17	5	6	6	27	23	21
Palestino	17	5	5	7	17	19	20
Nublense	17	4	7	6	27	35	19
Cobreloa	17	4	6	7	22	22	18
U Concepcion	17	4	6	7	20	24	18
Morning	17	4	5	8	15	24	17
La Serena	17	4	3	10	19	44	15
San Luis	17	2	6	9	19	34	12

34-round season (17x2); bottom 2 will be relegated; 3rd & 4th bottom will enter rel/prom play-offs

COLOMBIA

Clausura

Regular season

July 17: Junior 2 Pereira 1; Indep Santa Fe 2 Indep Medellin 0.
July 18: Cucuta 2 Envigado 0; Quindio 1 La Equidad 0; Once Caldas 2 Cartagena 1; Huila 1 America 1; Chico 1 Cortulua 0; Dep Cali 1 Tolima 1.
July 24: Envigado 1 Once Caldas 2; Millonarios 1 Dep Cali 0.
July 25: Pereira 1 Cucuta 2; La Equidad 1 Junior 0; Cartagena 0 Chico 0; Cortulua 1 Huila 1; Tolima 2 Quindio 0; America 1 Indep Santa Fe 2.

COLOMBIA – CLAUSURA REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cucuta	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Ind Santa Fe	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Once Caldas	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Tolima	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Chico	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Millonarios	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Junior	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
La Equidad	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Quindio	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Huila	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
America	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Cartagena	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Cortulua	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Dep Cali	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Pereira	2	0	0	2	2	4	0
Ind Medellin	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Envigado	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

18-round regular season – top 8 will enter championship play-offs; team with worst average points over three most recent seasons will be relegated; 2nd worst will enter rel/prom play-off

ECUADOR

2nd stage

July 9: Olmedo 3 Espoli 2.
July 10: Independiente 1 Barcelona 2; LDU 4 Manta 2; Macara 4 El Nacional 1; Dep Quito 1 Cuenca 2.
July 11: Emelec 2 Univ Catolica 0.
July 16: Cuenca 3 Independiente 1; Manta 3 Olmedo 0.
July 17: Barcelona 2 Macara 1; Univ Catolica 3 Dep Quito 0.
July 18: El Nacional 2 LDU 3; Espoli 1 Emelec 1.
July 22: LDU 2 Barcelona 1.
July 23: Dep Quito 1 Independiente 1.
July 24: Univ Catolica 0 Espoli 0; Macara 1 Cuenca 2.
July 25: Olmedo 1 El Nacional 1; Emelec 0 Manta 0.

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU	3	3	0	0	9	5	9
Cuenca	3	3	0	0	7	3	9
Barcelona	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Emelec	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Manta	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Univ Catolica	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Olmedo	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Macara	3	1	0	2	6	5	3
Espoli	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Independiente	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
El Nacional	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Dep Quito	3	0	1	2	2	6	1

22-round stage (11x2) – 2nd stage winner then meets 1st stage winner to decide overall champion; the 2 teams with fewest points from both stages combined will be relegated

PARAGUAY

Clausura

July 16: Luqueno 1 Libertad 2.
July 17: Trinidense 1 3 de Febrero 1; Tacuary 0 Rubio Nu 0.
July 18: Sol de America 1 Guarani 2; Nacional 0 Cerro Porteno 0; Olimpia 3 Colombia 0.
July 24: 3 de Febrero 0 Luqueno 0; Libertad 3 Tacuary 0; Rubio Nu 1 Colombia 0.
July 25: Cerro Porteno 2 Sol de America 0; Guarani 0 Trinidense 1; Nacional 0 Olimpia 2.

PARAGUAY – CLAUSURA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Libertad	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Cerro Porteno	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Trinidense	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Rubio Nu	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Guarani	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
3 de Febrero	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Luqueno	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Nacional	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Tacuary	2	0	1	1	0	3	1
Sol America	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Colombia	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

22-round tournament (11x2); team with worst average points over three most recent seasons will be relegated; 2nd worst will enter rel/prom play-off

PERU

First stage

July 10: Huancayo 0 Sporting Cristal 1; Leon 1 Cienciano 0; Alianza Atletico 0 CNI 1; Cesar Vallejo 1 Juan Aurich 1; Sport Boys 3 Total Chalaco 2; Melgar 2 Inti Gas 1; Universitario 0 Alianza Lima 1.
July 11: San Martin 4 Jose Galvez 0.
July 17: Leon 4 San Martin 2; Sporting Cristal 4 Inti Gas 1; Alianza Lima 4 CNI 1.
July 18: Alianza Atletico 4 Sport Boys 0; Huancayo 3 Melgar 0; Total Chalaco 1 Juan Aurich 2; Cesar Vallejo 0 Universitario 1.
July 24: CNI 1 Sporting Cristal 0; Inti Gas 2 Total Chalaco 0; Sport Boys 0 Leon 0; Jose Galvez 0 Alianza Lima 1.
July 25: Juan Aurich 5 Cienciano 2; San Martin 1 Cesar Vallejo 0; Melgar 2 Alianza Atletico 0; Universitario 3 Huancayo 0.

PERU – FIRST STAGE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Martin	25	16	5	4	54	26	53
Alianza Lima	25	14	5	6	43	26	47
Cesar Vallejo	25	13	5	7	42	25	44
Leon	25	13	4	8	41	25	43
Universitario	25	13	4	8	35	19	43
Juan Aurich	25	11	7	7	38	28	40
S Cristal	25	11	6	8	37	35	39
Huancayo	25	9	5	11	37	37	32
Inti Gas	25	10	2	13	32	36	32
Melgar	25	8	8	9	33	38	32
CNI	25	8	5	12	33	45	29
Sport Boys	25	7	5	13	25	45	26
Total Chalaco	25	6	7	12	25	38	25
Cienciano*	24	7	5	12	25	39	24
Al Atletico	25	4	9	12	20	37	21
Jose Galvez	24	4	8	12	12	33	20

30-round stage (15x2). In the 2nd stage, the division splits into two groups – the teams finishing the 1st stage in odd-numbered positions go into one, the teams in even-numbered positions go into the other
**2pts deducted for failing to pay a former player*

CONCACAF

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw

Group A
Arabe Unido (Pan)
Real Salt Lake (USA)
San Francisco (Pan) OR Cruz Azul (Mex)
Toronto (Can) OR Motagua (Hnd)

Group B
Brujas (CR) OR Joe Public (T&T)
Columbus Crew (USA)
Municipal (Gtm)
San Juan Jabloteh (T&T) OR Santos Laguna (Mex)

Group C
Monterrey (Mex)
Saprissa (CR)
Seattle Sounders (USA) OR Isidro Metapan (ElS)
Tauro (Pan) OR Marathon (Hnd)

Group D
CD FAS (ElS) OR Xelaju (Gtm)
LA Galaxy (USA) OR Puerto Rico Islanders (PR)
Olimpia (Hnd)
Toluca (Mex)

Matchdays:
August 17-19, August 24-26, September 14-16, September 21-23, September 28-30, October 19-21

Top two in each group qualify for quarter-finals

MEXICO

Apertura

Regular season

July 23: Tecos 0 Cruz Azul 3.
July 24: Jaguares 1 Necaxa 1; Tigres 0 Queretaro 1; Pachuca 3 America 0; Guadalajara 0 Puebla 0; San Luis 1 Monterrey 1; Atlante 1 Santos 4.
July 25: Pumas 2 Toluca 1; Morelia 1 Atlas 0.

MEXICO – APERTURA REGULAR – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Santos	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Monterrey	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Necaxa	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Guadalajara	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Tigres	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Tecos	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

MEXICO – APERTURA REGULAR – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
San Luis	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Toluca	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Atlas	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Atlante	1	0	0	1	1	4	0
America	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

MEXICO – APERTURA REGULAR – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Pumas	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Morelia	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Queretaro	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Jaguares	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Puebla	1	0	1	0	0	0	1

17-round regular season (17x1) – top 2 in each group and the 2 other teams with most points, regardless of group, will enter championship play-offs. No relegation after apertura

On top...Chad Matthews (left) for Columbus against Houston

CONGO DR

Holders' winning start

TP Mazembe Englebert sent out a clear signal about their high hopes of defending their CAF Champions League crown with a 2-0 away win over Dynamos of Zimbabwe on the opening weekend of the tournament's group stage.

Mazembe's squad has taken on a more cosmopolitan look over the last few years and it was Zambia's Given Singuluma, who scored both goals in Harare.

NIGERIA

Sixth-time winners

Enyimba won a record-breaking sixth league title when they beat closest contenders Kano Pillars 2-1 in the last game of the season.

A goal in each half from Osas Idehen and Josiah Maduabuchi put the home side on the path to victory, while Moses Ogaga grabbed a consolation for the Pillars.

Last season's champions Bayelsa United were relegated.

SOUTH KOREA

New national boss

Gyeongnam's coach, Cho Kwang-rae, has been picked to take over the national side from Huh Jung-moo.

Chosen...Cho

UNITED STATES

Regular season

July 9: Chicago 0 Salt Lake 1.
July 10: Toronto 1 Colorado 0; Philadelphia 1 San Jose 2; New York 0 DC United 0; New England 2 Los Angeles 0; Houston 0 Columbus 0; Kansas City 0 Chivas 2.
July 11: Seattle 1 Dallas 1.
July 14: Columbus 0 Kansas City 1.
July 15: DC United 0 Seattle 1.
July 17: Philadelphia 2 Toronto 1; Columbus 2 New York 0; Dallas 2 Salt Lake 0; Colorado 1 Kansas City 1.
July 18: DC United 1 Los Angeles 2.
July 22: Los Angeles 2 San Jose 2.
July 24: Toronto 1 Dallas 1; Columbus 3 Houston 0; Salt Lake 1 Chivas 1.
July 25: Seattle 2 Colorado 1.

USA – REGULAR – EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Columbus	17	10	4	3	25	13	34
New York	16	8	2	6	18	19	26
Toronto	16	6	5	5	19	18	23
Chicago	14	4	5	5	18	19	17
Kansas City	16	4	4	8	13	20	16
Philadelphia	14	4	2	8	18	26	14
New England	15	4	2	9	15	26	14
DC United	17	3	3	11	12	28	12

USA – REGULAR – WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Los Angeles	18	12	4	2	29	10	40
Salt Lake	17	9	4	4	29	14	31
Dallas	16	6	8	2	20	14	26
San Jose	15	6	5	4	20	18	23
Colorado	16	6	5	5	18	16	23
Seattle	18	6	4	8	20	25	22
Houston	17	5	4	8	21	25	19
Chivas	16	4	3	9	18	22	15

30-round regular season (15x2) – top 2 in each conference and the 4 other teams with most points, regardless of conference, will enter championship play-offs. No relegation from this league

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

July 16: ES Setif (Alg) 0 Esperance (Tun) 1.
July 18: Dynamos (Zim) 0 TP Mazembe (DRC) 2.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Esperance	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
ES Setif	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Dynamos	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group B

July 18: Heartland (Nga) 1 Al Ahly (Egy) 1; Ismaili (Egy) 0 JS Kabylie (Alg) 1.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
JS Kabylie	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Al Ahly	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Heartland	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Ismaili	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Top two in both groups qualify for semi-finals

CONFEDERATION CUP

Intermediate round draw

(losing teams from the Champions League 2nd round entered at this stage)
1st legs - July 16-18
Al Hilal (Sud) 5 Caps United (Zim) 0
Al Ittihad (Lby) 2 Primeiro Agosto (Ang) 0
Al Merreikh (Sud) 2 AS Fan (Ngr) 2
Djoliba (Mli) 0 CR Belouizdad (Alg) 0
Gaborone United (Bot) 1 Haras Hedood (Egy) 0
Petro Atletico (Ang) 0 CS Sfaxien (Tun) 0
SuperSport United (Saf) 2 FUS Rabat (Mor) 1
Zanaco (Zam) 4 Enyimba (Nga) 0

2nd legs - July 30-Aug 1

Winners qualify for group stage

NIGERIA

NIGERIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Enyimba	38	20	10	8	43	25	70
Kano Pillars	38	19	9	10	48	29	66
Sunshine Stars	38	19	7	12	39	30	64
Kwara	38	18	6	14	43	34	60
Rangers	38	15	13	10	34	22	58
Warri Wolves	38	17	7	14	50	43	58
Niger	38	16	7	15	42	38	55
Heartland	38	16	6	16	37	33	54
Gombe	38	16	4	18	34	33	52
Kaduna	38	15	7	16	40	45	52
Shooting Stars	38	14	10	14	27	33	52
Dolphins	38	13	12	13	39	39	51
Lobi Stars	38	14	9	15	34	37	51
Ocean Boys	38	14	8	16	32	36	50
Zamfara	38	13	10	15	30	46	49
Sharks	38	14	6	18	45	41	48
Wikki (R)	38	13	8	17	40	38	47
Bayelsa (R)	38	13	8	17	40	46	47
Gateway (R)	38	11	7	20	33	46	40
Ranchers (R)	38	10	6	22	23	59	36

UGANDA

UGANDA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bunamwaya	34	21	11	2	61	22	74
Express	34	21	9	4	44	15	72
URA	34	20	10	4	53	23	70
KCC	34	14	15	5	41	14	57
Simba	34	14	8	12	33	33	50
Police	34	13	9	12	34	31	48
SC Villa*	34	12	15	7	32	27	45
Nalubaale	34	12	8	14	34	34	44
Masaka	34	12	8	14	29	41	44
Fire Masters	34	11	10	13	30	37	43
Kinyara	34	10	12	12	35	33	42
Victors	34	9	15	10	25	30	42
CRO	34	10	10	14	32	36	40
Boroboro** (R)	34	9	13	12	29	40	37
Maji (R)	34	8	10	16	33	45	34
Iganga (R)	34	7	10	17	25	40	31
Hoima (R)	34	7	3	24	24	53	24
Arua*** (R)	34	5	6	23	20	72	15

**6pts deducted for failing to show for a game*
***3pts deducted for failing to show for a game*
****6pts deducted for failing to show for two games*

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Al Hilal (Sau) v Al Gharafa (Qat)
Chonbuk Motors (SKo) v Al Shabab (Sau)
Seongnam Ilhwa (SKo) v Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
Zob-Ahan (Irn) v Pohang Steelers (SKo)

1st legs - September 15; 2nd legs - September 22

AFC CUP

Quarter-finals draw

Al Ittihad (Syr) v Kazma (Kuw)
Al Karamah (Syr) v Muangthong United (Tha)
Al Riffa (Bhn) v Da Nang (Vie)
Thai Port (Tha) v Al Qadsia (Kuw)

1st legs - September 14; 2nd legs - September 21

CHINA

CHINA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Shanghai	14	8	3	3	23	16	27
Shandong	13	7	5	1	28	15	26
Henan	14	5	8	1	19	14	23
Hangzhou	14	7	2	5	20	17	23
Liaoning	14	6	4	4	16	15	22
Beijing	14	5	5	4	14	13	20
Changchun	14	5	2	7	21	19	17
Jiangsu	14	3	8	3	14	14	17
Shenzhen	15	4	5	6	15	16	17
Tianjin	14	3	8	3	12	13	17
Shaanxi	14	4	5	5	12	17	17
Dalian	14	3	7	4	15	15	16
Nanchang	14	4	3	7	16	19	15
Chongqing	14	4	2	8	16	22	14
Qingdao	14	2	7	5	16	22	13
Changsha	14	2	6	6	8	18	12

Standings on July 27
30-round season (15x2); bottom 2 will be relegated

JAPAN

July 14: Kashima 1 Shonan 0; Kawasaki 0 Omiya 0; Gamba 1 Kyoto 1; Sanfrecce 0 Cerezo 5.
July 17: Omiya 0 Nagoya 1; Tokyo 2 Vissel 2; Shimizu 0 Jubilo 0; Montedio 3 Vegalta 1; Kashima 2 Kawasaki 1; Albirex 1 Cerezo 1.
July 18: Kyoto 0 Shonan 1; Gamba 3 Urawa 2; Sanfrecce 3 Yokohama 0.
July 24: Urawa 0 Sanfrecce 1; Jubilo 2 Kashima 3; Cerezo 3 Montedio 0; Vegalta 2 Albirex 3; Yokohama 1 Gamba 0; Nagoya 3 Shimizu 3.
July 25: Shonan 1 Tokyo 3; Vissel 3 Omiya 1; Kawasaki 1 Kyoto 0.

JAPAN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	14	9	3	2	25	13	30
Shimizu	14	7	6	1	26	15	27
Nagoya	14	8	2	4	22	17	26
Kawasaki	14	7	3	4	24	22	24
Cerezo	14	6	5	3	22	14	23
Sanfrecce	14	6	4	4	16	17	22
Yokohama	14	6	3	5	19	16	21
Albirex	14	5	6	3	18	16	21
Urawa	14	6	2	6	20	18	20
Gamba	14	4	6	4	25	22	18
Tokyo	14	4	6	4	17	14	18
Montedio	14	5	2	7	14	22	17
Jubilo	14	4	4	6	16	20	16
Vissel	14	4	3	7	17	20	15
Vegalta	14	3	4	7	16	23	13
Shonan	14	3	3	8	14	24	12
Omiya	14	2	4	8	10	18	10
Kyoto	14	2	4	8	15	25	10

34-round season (17x2); bottom 3 will be relegated

SOUTH KOREA

Regular season

July 10: Pohang 1 Chunnam 1; Chonbuk 4 Daegu 0.
July 17: Jeju 5 Gangwon 0; Busan 4 Pohang 2; Seoul 1 Chunnam 0; Daejeon 0 Chonbuk 4; Gyeongnam 1 Gwangju 0.
July 18: Daegu 1 Suwon 3; Ulsan 0 Seongnam 1.
July 24: Gwangju 0 Seoul 2; Daejeon 0 Seongnam 1; Gangwon 2 Chonbuk 3; Incheon 2 Jeju 3.
July 25: Chunnam 2 Busan 2; Pohang 1 Suwon 1; Daegu 1 Gyeongnam 1.

SOUTH KOREA – REGULAR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jeju	13	8	4	1	25	11	28
Seongnam	13	8	3	2	26	10	27
Seoul	13	9	0	4	25	11	27
Chonbuk	13	7	4	2	29	17	25
Gyeongnam	13	7	4	2	18	10	25
Ulsan	13	7	3	3	17	15	24
Busan	13	6	4	3	21	14	22
Incheon	13	6	1	6	20	20	19
Chunnam	14	3	4	7	20	26	13
Gwangju	13	3	4	6	10	17	13
Suwon	13	3	2	8	16	24	11
Pohang	14	2	5	7	18	29	11
Daejeon	13	2	4	7	9	23	10
Daegu	13	2	3	8	14	25	9
Gangwon	14	2	3	9	15	31	9

28-round regular season (14x2) – top 6 will enter championship play-offs

OCEANIA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Championship play-offs

Final

Apr 24
Hekari United 5 (Jack 30, 32, Maemae pen 40, D Muta 65, Mela 85)
Gigira Laitepo Morobe 0
HT: 3-0

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Championship play-offs

Final

May 29
Koloale 2 (Totori 4, Faarodo pen 85)
Solomon Warriors 1 (Wasi 70)

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"When the team takes on board my football philosophy, we will not have to worry what the octopus says. I'd rather have it on a plate"

Internazionale boss Rafa Benitez refuses to believe in the clairvoyance of Paul the Octopus

"He wasn't at the wheel. In a normal country, he wouldn't be involved"
The Portuguese embassy in the Democratic Republic of Congo refutes suggestions that Benfica striker Ariza Makukula was at the wheel of a jeep which collided with a motorbike in Kinshasa, killing two people, one of whom was a top singer from the African nation. The Portugal international says his chauffeur was responsible

"It does not fit in with our statutes"
Barcelona spokesman Toni Freixa on why Camp Nou legend Johan Cruyff was stripped of his honorary president title following the election of Sandro Rosell as club president

"Jose Mourinho is profoundly Catholic and he believes in God. In matters that concern his professional life, he believes in hard work and not in the miracles of any old sorcerer"
Eladio Parames, spokesman for the Real Madrid coach, denies the claims of a Kenyan witch doctor that he had been consulted by Mourinho during his summer holiday

"I think he would have gone to prison if he wasn't a pro footballer"
Emmanuel Petit describes his old Arsenal team-mate Martin Keown as "the most gutsy player I've ever seen"

"Allegri is an outstanding teacher but I'm the professor here"
Italian premier and Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi makes it clear to new coach Massimiliano Allegri where the power really lies at the club

"Even without me, Dinamo remains the best team in this country"
Modest to a fault, Dinamo Zagreb's veteran international centre-back Robert Kovac retires from the game after 15 years as a professional with Bayer Leverkusen, Bayern Munich, Juventus, Borussia Dortmund and Dinamo

"We should be proud that our little country were World Cup runners-up. No other side asked as many questions of the Spanish"
Salzburg's Dutch coach Huub Stevens gives short shrift to the notion that Holland tried to kick their way to the world title

Crazy times...Estevan

"FIFA? They only concern themselves with the stadia and what's seen on TV. Lots of things went wrong in South Africa. After our first game we had to go back to our hotel in taxis after waiting around for three-quarters of an hour for our bus"
Paraguay keeper Justo Villar makes sure he's not on the Christmas card list of Sepp Blatter

"If I'd been told it would end this way... it's been a horrible mess...a bazaar"
Michel Estevan, the coach of newly promoted Ligue 1 side Arles-Avignon finds himself sacked after the first day of pre-season training. He was later reinstated

"I was a minimum-wage national team coach"
Sacked France boss Raymond Domenech fails to register his €50,000 a month salary plus his €826,000 of World Cup bonuses

Old Gunners...Petit (left) and Keown

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